

THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE LABOUR PARTY  
IN THE BLACK COUNTRY (1918-39)

JOHN WARD M.A.

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the  
University of Wolverhampton for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

February 2004

This work or any part thereof has not previously been presented in any form to the University or to any other body whether for the purposes of assessment, publication or any other purpose (unless otherwise indicated). Save for any express acknowledgements, references and / or bibliographies cited in the work, I confirm that the intellectual content of the work is the result of my own efforts and of no other person.

The right of John Ward to be identified as the author of this work is asserted in accordance with ss.77 and 78 of the Copyright, Designs and Patent Act 1988. At this date copyright is owned by the author.

Signature .....J.A.M. Ward.....

Date .....June 2004.....

DXN075964  
DX229841

U.W.E.L. LEARNING RESOURCES	
ACC. No. 2356368	CLASS
CONTROL M0018912 WP	Thesis collection
DATE 29 JUL. 2005	
SHE WV	

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

I should like to acknowledge the support provided by Eric Taylor and John Benson at the University of Wolverhampton. I should also like to acknowledge the help received from local libraries and the Museum of Labour History in Manchester.

## CONTENTS

Chapter	Page
Abstract	6
Introduction	7
1. The 1918 General Election	35
A. National Developments	35
B. Regional Developments	43
1. The Labour Party in Birmingham	43
2. The Labour Party in the Black Country	48
A. Economic and Political Background to 1918	48
B. The 1918 General Election	52
1. Smethwick	52
2. West Bromwich	54
3. Wednesbury	56
4. Kingswinford	57
5. Stourbridge	58
6. Wolverhampton West	60
7. Bilston	63
8. Dudley	64
9. Walsall	65
10. Wolverhampton East	67
C. Conclusions	69
2. 1919-1922	94
A. National Developments	94
B. Regional Developments	99
1. Economic Background	99
2. The Labour Party in Birmingham	102
3. The Labour Party in the Black Country	105
A. Early Political Successes	105
B. The Dudley By-Election 1921	107
C. The 1921 Municipal Elections	109
D. The Wolverhampton West By-Election 1922	111
E. The 1922 Municipal Elections	114
F. The 1922 General Election	115
1. Smethwick	116
2. West Bromwich	117
3. Wednesbury	119
4. Kingswinford	120
5. Dudley	121
6. Wolverhampton West	123
7. Wolverhampton East	124
8. Bilston	126
9. Walsall	127
10. Stourbridge	128
G. Conclusions	129
3. The 1923 and 1924 General Elections	151
A. National Developments	151
B. Regional Developments	156
1. The Labour Party in Birmingham	156
2. The Labour Party in the Black Country	160

A.	Economic and Political Background	160
B.	The 1923 and 1924 General Elections	162
1.	West Bromwich	162
2.	Smethwick	165
3.	Wednesbury	167
4.	Kingswinford	170
5.	Bilston	172
6.	Wolverhampton West	174
7.	Wolverhampton East	177
8.	Dudley	179
9.	Walsall	182
10.	Stourbridge	184
C.	Conclusions	186
4.	1924-1929	207
A.	National Developments	207
B.	Regional Developments	212
1.	The Labour Party in Birmingham	212
2.	The Labour Party in the Black Country	216
A.	The State of Local Parties	216
B.	The Walsall By-Election 1925	222
C.	The Smethwick By-Election 1926	224
D.	The Stourbridge By-Election 1927	231
E.	The Economic Background	233
F.	The 1929 General Election	236
1.	Wolverhampton West	236
2.	Wolverhampton East	237
3.	Bilston	238
4.	Dudley	239
5.	Walsall	240
6.	Stourbridge	241
7.	Smethwick	242
8.	West Bromwich	243
9.	Wednesbury	244
10.	Kingswinford	245
G.	Conclusions	245
5.	1929-1931	265
A.	National Developments	265
B.	Regional Developments	273
1.	The Labour Party in Birmingham	273
2.	The Labour Party in the Black Country	277
A.	The State of Local Parties	277
B.	The 1931 General Election	287
1.	Smethwick	287
2.	Wolverhampton West	288
3.	Dudley	289
4.	Walsall	291
5.	Wolverhampton East	294
6.	Stourbridge	295
7.	Bilston	296
8.	West Bromwich	297
9.	Wednesbury	298
10.	Kingswinford	299
C.	Conclusions	300



6.	1932-1939	321
A.	National Developments	321
B.	Regional Developments	328
1.	The Labour Party in Birmingham	328
2.	The Labour Party in the Black Country	334
A.	The State of Local Parties 1932-35	334
B.	The 1935 General Election	340
1.	Kingswinford	340
2.	West Bromwich	341
3.	Wednesbury	342
4.	Smethwick	343
5.	Bilston	344
6.	Wolverhampton West	344
7.	Wolverhampton East	346
8.	Walsall	347
9.	Dudley	349
10.	Stourbridge	350
C.	Conclusions	351
D.	The State of Local Parties 1936-39	353
	Conclusion	378
	Appendices	382
	Bibliography	427

## ABSTRACT

This thesis shows that for much of the inter-war period the Labour Party in the Black Country developed in a pattern, which was distinct within the West Midlands. Whilst Birmingham could claim to remain as the stronghold of Unionism during this period, the Black Country came close at times to becoming a 'Labour Heartland'. This makes it impossible to generalise about the strength of Unionism in the West Midlands during the inter-war years.

Even before 1914 Joseph Chamberlain's Unionism with its call for protective tariffs, coupled with social reforms, had had less of an impact on the working-class vote in the Black Country than in Birmingham. Nevertheless, the Labour Party had been slow to grow in the Black Country in pre-war years, suffering from similar constraints on its development as in other working-class regions. These were, in particular, the limited expansion of the trade union movement and the restrictive nature of the pre-war franchise.

The situation altered rapidly in the post-war years with the Labour Party returning four MPs from the ten Black Country constituencies in the 1918 General Election. This was a relatively greater success than in most similar working-class regions across the country. During the early 1920s the party built steadily on this initial success, winning more parliamentary seats, although relatively fewer on municipal councils. This was mainly because these elections were still fought on a restricted franchise. Expansion was even swifter in the second half of the decade, culminating in Labour's success in the 1929 General Election, when the Black Country returned nine Labour MPs. This achievement proved short-lived, however, as the region's nine Labour MPs were defeated in the 1931 General Election. The party's share of the total vote, however, dropped less here than nationally, despite the added problem of the defection of three of the region's Labour MPs. Nevertheless the party recovered only modestly during the 1930s, which ended with the Black Country having fewer MPs than in 1918. In this respect at least Labour reflected the position in Birmingham at this time, where, apart from the 1929 General Election, the city almost continually returned Unionist candidates.

Labour's initial success in the Black Country came with the removal of the constraints on its development. This came with the reform of the parliamentary franchise in 1918, but more especially with the growth of trade unionism in the region during the war. This further weakened the bonds between employers and their workforce, which had traditionally characterised the workshop economy of Birmingham and extended into parts of the Black Country. The fact that Labour was slow to build on this initial post-war success was mainly a consequence of the industrial depression, which affected the Black Country particularly badly in the early 1920s. Falling union membership and funds affected local parties, which were very dependent on the trade union levy. This situation was made much worse by the 1927 Trade Union Act, which further hit trade union subscriptions to the Labour Party. Where the evidence is available it also seems that internal feuds and disputes frequently affected local parties.

Labour's success in 1929 was influenced by such local factors as an improving economy and better party organisation with many constituencies showing an increase in activities and in the number of individual members. The impact of personalities such as the recently elected Oswald Mosley should not be exaggerated. Support for Labour mirrored the parochial character of many parts of the region, where most of the electorate still lived in close-knit working-class communities. This may account for the low swing against the party in the 1931 General Election, which followed soon after the fall of the Labour Government.

Labour's modest performances during the 1930s were only partly a consequence of the events of 1931, which, nevertheless, had a significant impact on local party morale and organisation. The region was also experiencing an economic recovery, which characterised much of the West Midlands during this decade. Credit for this though went to the National Government, which also offered populist policies on tariffs and social reform. It meant that although support for Labour remained fairly solid throughout the period, the region could return only three MPs in 1935. This meant that by the end of this decade it would not be possible to describe the Black Country as a 'Labour heartland'.



## INTRODUCTION

### 1. THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE PERIOD AND THE REGION

The period from 1918-1939 should have been a time of great opportunity for the Labour Party. These were the years when Britain first experienced mass democracy, following the threefold increase in the electorate with the passage of the 1918 Representation of the People Act.(1) The country was also recovering from the effects of the First World War, which had hastened the pace of change in many areas, much to the benefit of Labour. At home, for instance, the trade union movement had emerged with even greater strength, which caused the wartime governments to consult it with growing frequency.(2) The war, itself, had been waged with an element of state collectivism, which many thought could now be used to cure the nation's social and economic ills.(3) Furthermore, the Liberal Party, which had traditionally spoken for the moderate Left, was now fatally divided. In these circumstances it might have been expected that Labour would have played a greater role in government during the inter-war years. Instead the party held power for only two brief periods.

The Black Country is an ideal region to study locally the fortunes of the inter-war Labour Party. Whilst it has been generally accepted that Birmingham remained a bastion of Conservatism in the inter-war years, albeit in the form of the Unionist Party, care needs to be taken not to assume that the Black Country fitted into this category.(4) Labour won four of the region's ten seats in the 1918 General Election. The party built on this position through the 1920s, culminating in the capture of nine of the seats in the 1929 General Election. These were all lost, however, in the 1931 Election, with just three being recaptured during the 1930s. Thus, having secured initial success in 1918, which continued through the 1920s, the 1930s saw something of a setback with the Labour Party ending the period with fewer MPs than at the start.

This does not coincide with the situation in nearby Birmingham or nationally. In Birmingham, for instance, Labour won only one of the 12 seats before the 1929 Election, at which 6 were then captured. All were lost, however, in 1931, with none being gained during the 1930s. Nationally the Labour Party, having lost all but 56 of its seats in the 1931 General Election, recovered to win 154 in the 1935 General Election, which was considerably more than the 57 it held after 1918.

Despite its proximity to the city of Birmingham the Black Country at this time has to be considered a region in its own right, being more of an industrial area than an urban one. It contained a number of interconnected industrial towns and villages, which shared little of the civic pride associated with

Chamberlain's Birmingham. Traditionally the Black Country was a region of coal mining, iron manufacturing and the production of semi-manufactured metalware, whilst Birmingham was a centre for finished goods and commercial capital.(5) By the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, however, many of the Black Country's industries were in depression, due in part to the exhaustion of their minerals, but also as a consequence of foreign competition.(6) There were, however, exceptions to this picture such as Wolverhampton, which at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century had developed new finished metal industries, such as electrical motors, cars, cycles, motor cycles and their components.(7)

Another feature, which distinguished much of the Black Country from Birmingham was the strength of Nonconformity, which had never taken off as a mass movement in the city.(8) Its strength in the Black Country in the first half of the century must be seen as a factor in the rise of Labour, given the generally accepted claim that the party owed more to Methodism than Marxism.(9) Despite these differences the two regions did share a number of features in common. The most obvious of these were the social problems with regard to health, housing and education, which were serious enough to have provided ample opportunities for the Labour Party to exploit.(10)

## **2. REGIONAL HISTORIES OF THE LABOUR PARTY**

A number of local studies have been made of the Labour Party during this period in other working-class regions. Reynolds and Laybourn, for instance, have made a study of the West Riding of Yorkshire, concluding that during the inter-war years Labour became "the most important single parliamentary party" in the region, making it a "Labour Heartland".(11) This, the authors claim, was achieved during the 1930s, despite the strength of the National Government and various anti-Socialist alliances, which operated in local elections. They stress the importance of the close links between the trade unions and local Labour parties throughout the period.(12) In particular, they show how it was trade union officials, who were frequently selected by the local parties for national and local elections.(13)

Savage, in a study of the Labour Party in Preston, also stresses the importance of the trade union link in enabling Labour to succeed here in the 1918 General Election.(14) He then claims, however, that the local party failed to broaden its support, causing it to lose ground in the early 1920s. This was followed by a recovery in the years leading up to the 1929 General Election, in which Labour won both seats in the town. Savage believes that this success was due to the local party broadening its support so that it



became “more neighbourhood than work-based”.(15) Labour then suffered from the party’s national setback in the 1931 General Election. Unlike West Yorkshire, however, Savage claims that Labour made little recovery in Preston during the rest of that decade. He blames this first on unemployment, which was to prove a divisive factor amongst the working class, and secondly on the alienation of women voters due to the policies of the 1929 Labour Government.(16) Savage’s conclusion is that the Labour Party did best when it concerned itself with the condition of the people, rather than the wage struggle.(17)

Thorpe has concentrated on the significance of the personality factor in local Labour parties with his study of Derby. Here Labour held one of the two parliamentary seats for the whole inter-war period except for 1931-35, whilst two of the seats were held in 1923-4 and 1929-31. Furthermore, the local party also controlled the borough council between 1928-31 and again from 1934. Thorpe praises the party here for “working ... to well defined strategies in improving housing, educational facilities and the condition of the town generally”. Defeat in 1931 was due only to “Labour’s perceived incompetence at national level”.(18) As for the basis of Labour’s success, he deals with the role of J.H.Thomas, one of the town’s Labour MPs during the inter-war years. He also points to the significance of the Co-operative Movement and the Nonconformist tradition in the town.(19) Even so Thorpe accepts the pivotal role of trade unions in their support of the local party.(20)

The Birmingham Labour Party has also attracted some interest. Historians have been mainly concerned to show the persistence of the Chamberlain factor in this working-class city. Hastings, for instance, attributes the Conservative success in Birmingham to a combination of the Chamberlain political machine, the weakness of trade unions and the policy of Tariff Reform.(21) Hopkins has written of the economic and social changes that took place in the city both before and after the First World War.(22) These were to threaten the Chamberlain tradition, which rested on the workshop system, where a close relationship between master and workers was reckoned to exist. Hopkins stresses the growth of the factory system which emerged in the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century, especially in the engineering industry, where power driven machine tools replaced the hand operated ones.(23) He also notes the significance in the inter-war years of the new outer suburbs, which expanded at the expense of the central wards, where the Chamberlain influence was strongest.(24) Briggs too has written of the changing economy of Birmingham, which, after a serious post-war recession, grew in the 1930s, due to the expansion of the new industries of electrical engineering and the motor trade, with its many



components.(25) Although both Hopkins and Briggs have stressed the growing size of the workplace, they have also pointed out that small firms still dominated the city's economy throughout this period.(26) Boughton has examined the political impact of these changes on Birmingham. He claims that during the inter-war years, "the Chamberlain tradition was a rapidly waning asset" and "the heyday of Birmingham Unionism was over". Nevertheless despite Labour's success in the 1929 General Election, Boughton is forced to admit that, following the defeat of 1931, the 1930s was a disastrous decade for the Birmingham Labour Party.(27)

Liverpool was another working-class city, where the Labour Party secured only limited success in the inter-war years. In a 1993 PhD thesis Davies has argued that this was not necessarily due to sectarian divisions. Instead he claims that the working class in Liverpool was divided between those in regular employment and those who were casually employed. This division led to the dockside communities being open to a wider range of political alternatives.(28)

The Labour Party in the Black Country has not attracted this type of attention, although there have been political studies of the towns of Walsall and Wolverhampton, in which the role of the local Labour Party is included.(29) Barnsby too has written an account of the Socialist Movement in both the Black Country and Birmingham during this period.(30) Meanwhile Gardner has analysed how the Wolverhampton Conservatives checked the advance of Labour in the town during the inter-war years. He has put the emphasis for their success on organisation rather than policy.(31) Finally West Midland politics between 1918-35 was the subject of a 1974 PhD thesis by K.W.D.Rolfe. Most emphasis here, however, was put on the Chamberlain factor, which meant that the Labour movement in the Black Country received much less attention.(32)

### **3. CONSTRAINTS ON THE GROWTH OF THE LABOUR PARTY BEFORE 1918**

The Labour Party secured its first breakthrough in the Black Country in the 1918 General Election when it won four of the region's ten parliamentary seats. This was a considerable achievement for a party, which had only limited roots in the region before the war. Other factors made these results even more remarkable. For instance over half of Labour's 57 successes nationally at this time came in coal mining constituencies. Although mining was still carried out in the Black Country, especially in the constituencies of Kingswinford and Walsall, it was no longer the predominant industry.(33) Furthermore Labour's four successes were all secured against couped Conservative candidates,

whilst a number of standing Labour MPs, who had been loyal to Lloyd George, were either unopposed or fought against uncoupled candidates.(34)

A number of constraints had held back the emergence of the Labour Party, both nationally and locally, in the years before 1914. These were particularly evident in a working-class region like the Black Country, where Labour had had little significance before 1914. Historians nationally, however, have disagreed over where the emphasis should be laid on these constraints.

It is generally agreed that the Labour Party emerged in industrial regions due to its close links with trade unions. In the Black Country, however, unions had been slow to develop before 1914. Taylor has concluded that even in 1914 in many industries “there was still no effective basis of union organisation” and where trade unions did exist they “combined a strong element of insularity with extreme local particularism”.(35) This situation was to prove a major constraint on the development of local Labour parties.

Benson has explained the factors behind the absence of a strong union movement in the region. He puts the emphasis on the survival of small-scale production, the subcontract system and the decline in real wages between the 1870s and the 1890s. He goes on to point out, however, that these features were by no means unique to the Black Country. He believes that the working class nationally at this time were “more divided and more acquiescent, industrially weaker and politically more conservative than has often been supposed”. Weak trade unions, coupled with the continued existence of small-scale industrial units were common throughout the country.(36)

This is a view also taken by McKibbin, who has looked more generally at the constraints on the growth of Marxism in Britain at this time. He points out that with 75 per cent of the workforce classed as manual working class, conditions seemed to favour the growth of a mass working-class party. Yet even by 1914 three-quarters of the workforce remained non-unionised, whilst of the 4 million who were in a trade union 40 per cent must have voted for a party other than Labour.(37) McKibbin also sees the size of the workforce as important, with only 100 firms, not plants, employing over 3,000 in the 1900s and just four ‘heavy industrial’ firms employing over 10,000. This was small compared to the continent and tended to lead to closer relations between employers and employed, as in the case of Chamberlain’s Birmingham.(38)

More generally McKibbin points out that working-class communities were not the unified structures that some outsiders believed them to be. Their culture, he claims, was “incapable of giving ideological



direction to a working-class consciousness".(39) McKibbin also reckons that there was a stability in British society, which led to a kind of deference towards the constitution, which Labour itself accepted.(40) Other constraints noted by McKibbin were rival interests to politics, such as sports, religion and hobbies, which grew as real wages rose amongst the working class. These activities along with organised religion tended to throw the middle and working classes together.(41) McKibbin points out too that whilst there was still much poverty, the poor were often those without the vote.(42)

Another constraint on the development of the Labour Party before 1914 was the policies of the two major parties. With an expanding electorate both the Conservatives and the Liberals were seeking to become more populist in order to attract working-class support. Tanner gives a number of reasons for Tory successes in working-class areas. In particular, he notes the appeal of the Empire and of Fair Trade, especially at a time of industrial depression. He also points to the fact that some Tories "supported a degree of social intervention", especially in areas like housing and the relief of poverty.(43) This was particularly the case following the party's fusion with Chamberlain's Liberal Unionists.

In the 1906 General Election the Conservatives had adopted Joseph Chamberlain's policy of Tariff Reform, as a means for solving unemployment and industrial stagnation. It had little success in the Black Country in that Election, as the Liberals won all but one of the seats there. In Birmingham, however, the Conservatives, under the Unionist banner, maintained their full complement of seats.(44) In the 1910 Elections the Conservatives Tariff Reform programme prevailed in the Black Country, leaving the Liberals with only two seats here after the December Election.(45) It was this situation, which must have helped to persuade Tanner to put the region into his category of working-class Tory.(46)

It was because of the strength of the Conservatives in working-class seats and the emergence of the Labour Party, that an electoral pact was arranged between the Liberals and Labour in 1903. This enabled Labour to stand 50 candidates in the 1906 Election, of which two-thirds were in working-class Tory seats or double member boroughs. 29 of these were elected.(47) Similar pressures helped to persuade the Liberal Government from 1905-14 to introduce a series of much needed social reforms, in order to give the party a populist appeal.(48) According to Clarke the Liberals, under the inspiration of Lloyd George, pushed through this reform programme, described as 'New Liberalism', in order to ensure that the Liberals remained the party of the working class.(49) Indeed its success has been judged



by the fact that Labour came last in all the by-elections it fought between 1910-14, leading to the suggestion that the Party was in decline at this time.(50)

Clarke's interpretation has been challenged by a number of historians, especially McKibbin, who claims that Labour was already the class-based party in the constituencies between 1910 and 1914. He points to the increased links with the trade unions, especially after the affiliation of the miners in 1908, and Labour electoral successes, especially in municipal elections. He sees the party's electoral strategy changing, so that it was unlikely that they would renew their pact with the Liberals for an election in 1915.(51) Savage and Miles similarly question the impact of New Liberalism. Whilst attractive to the working class, they claim that it "simply did not address the sort of class issues, which they knew to be vitally important to them".(52)

Support for Clarke's view has come from Tanner, although he has admitted that the 'Progressive Alliance' between Liberals and Labour was coming increasingly under attack after 1910. The Labour position, for instance, was being challenged by the Socialist left.(53) New Liberalism was also vulnerable within the Liberal Party, as its supporters were in a minority in the Cabinet and Parliament. Moreover they had failed to radicalise the constituencies, where a strong conservative element remained.(54) Tanner believes that the Liberals were in danger of losing working-class support in the pre-war years due to their involvement in issues such as Irish Home Rule, Welsh Church Disestablishment and naval rearmament. The Liberals were also divided over women's suffrage and were uncertain in their relations with trade unions.(55) Moreover when Lloyd George sought to revive New Liberalism through his land reform programme and the 1914 Budget, opposition within the party was such that he was forced to modify his plans.(56)

There remained, however, much support within the trade unions and the Labour Party for the Liberal legislative programme. Tanner writes that in 1914 Labour had "not created a 'class-based' political allegiance which would undermine the Liberal Party on a broad front. In whole areas of the country - including heavy industrialised, unionised, iron and steel, engineering, and textile manufacturing areas, and even to some extent in several coalfields - Labour was unsuccessful".(57) This is a view challenged by Laybourn, who points to Labour's success in West Yorkshire, where a significant number of seats were won in municipal elections before 1914.(58) Tanner, however, argues that had there been a General Election in 1915 the pact would have continued with the position little different

from 1910. The main factor restricting Labour from selecting extra candidates was that the trade unions were either unwilling or incapable of financing a broad campaign against the Liberals.(59)

Another major constraint on the growth of the Labour Party, which has also aroused controversy amongst historians, was the electoral system. At one time it was thought that the 1885 Reform Act provided adult male suffrage.(60) In fact, Blewett has pointed out that at the time of the 1911 census 7.9 million voters were on the register in the UK, comprising just 63.3% of the total adult male population.(61) Under the terms of the 1885 Act the franchise was held by adult males, who were householders. Excluded were sons living with their parents, domestic servants living with their employers and all lodgers paying less than £10 a year in rent. Furthermore there was a 12-month registration qualification for those who were not owner occupiers, followed by a 6 month wait for all.(62) Another major anomaly was the existence of an estimated 5-600,000 plural voters, who comprised 7 per cent of the electorate.(63)

Matthew, McKibbin and Kay have pointed out that, with about 4.67 million men disenfranchised, the pre-war franchise prevented the emergence of a true working-class electorate, which was to be a major constraint on the Labour Party. They claim, for instance, that in 1910 whilst the county franchise was 69.9 per cent that for the boroughs was only 59.8 per cent.(64) The consequence of this was noted by Pelling, who in his Social Geography of British Elections has estimated that in the pre-war years there were only 89 constituencies with 95 members, which were “predominantly working-class in character”.(65)

Other historians have questioned whether there was a voteless proletariat before 1914. Clarke has responded to McKibbin’s argument by claiming that since Labour was the party of trade unionists, its supporters were likely to have been enfranchised before 1914. Indeed, he claims that since the Liberals had become a distinctly working-class party by 1910, their support was little different socially from that of Labour.(66) Hart too has estimated that Labour would have secured only 15-20 per cent of the vote before 1914 even with the wider franchise, leaving them in a position similar to the Liberals in 1924 and 1929.(67)

Tanner claims that the pre-war franchise discriminated, in the case of men, against the young, especially sons living with their parents, which affected all classes and parties. It would be difficult to assume that these male voters would have voted Labour. He estimates, for instance, that 450,000 middle-class males were disenfranchised in this way. Overall he claims that the working class made up



70 per cent of the pre-war electorate, compared with 80 per cent of the total population. His conclusion is that “the electoral framework in which Edwardian political parties operated was not overwhelmingly biased against the working class”(68)

Laybourn has countered Tanner’s argument by pointing out that voteless single middle-class males constituted only a small proportion of the 5 million who were disenfranchised, of whom 90% were working class on Tanner’s own figures. He reckons that “given the social position of these men and the rising commitment of the trade union movement to the Labour Party ... at least a majority would have voted Labour had they had the opportunity”. Laybourn also believes that Labour was handicapped before 1918 by their lack of full-time agents, who played a vital role in securing the registration of voters.(69)

Finance has always been seen as a factor constraining Labour’s pre-war development. The Osborne Judgement of 1909 prevented trade unions from contributing to the Labour Party. This particularly affected Labour’s ability to fight the second General Election of 1910, when only 62 candidates were put forward. It was, however, not lack of finance but Labour’s poor by-election performances between 1906-10 that was behind the continuation of the election pact with the Liberals.(70) Between 1911-1914 Labour was able to solve some of its financial worries firstly by assisting the Liberal Government in securing the payment of MPs and secondly through the passing of the Trade Union Act in 1913, which allowed for the introduction of the political fund.

#### **4. FACTORS TO BE CONSIDERED WHEN DETERMINING LABOUR’S POST-WAR GROWTH**

Following their success in 1918 in the Black Country, it was felt that the Labour Party would sweep forward in the succeeding years. In fact the party made only modest progress in the region during the early 1920s. It was only in the second half of the decade that Labour began to advance more rapidly, winning nine of the ten seats in the 1929 General Election, whilst the Conservatives lost all of theirs. Labour also made substantial gains in Birmingham, where six seats were captured. In 1931, however, Labour’s electoral performance went into reverse when, in the October General Election, the party lost all its seats in both Birmingham and the Black Country. Some recovery was made during the 1930s with Labour winning three Black Country seats in the 1935 General Election. Nevertheless, the Party was now performing less well during this period than other similar regions. Indeed by the outbreak of war it was obvious that the Labour Party had failed to capture the bulk of the working-class Black



Country vote, as the Conservatives held more parliamentary seats and controlled most local councils. Had there been a General Election in 1940 it seems unlikely that Labour would have gained any further seats in the region.

In order to assess Labour's performance in the Black Country during these inter-war years national factors are a major consideration. Certainly at a time when communications, in the form of the popular press, the radio and cinema newsreels, were making dramatic advances it would be unwise to ignore their impact.<sup>(71)</sup> Nevertheless other factors need to be considered when studying local Labour parties. Indeed a number of indicators can be used to determine the relative performance of Labour in a particular region.

One of these is the strength of local party organisation, with special reference to the size of membership. Figures for individual members of all the local parties can be found in Labour's Annual Reports. Local policies and activities can be studied through Labour Party Minute Books, of which those for Wolverhampton and Walsall are available along with those for Birmingham. The role of women in local parties is also significant, especially given their increased voting power during this period.<sup>(72)</sup> Under the 1918 Constitution women could join the party, either through the Women's Sections, or through their local party. The Minute Book of the Women's Section of the Bilston Labour Party is available for part of this period.

Membership is a particularly important consideration. Traditionally this had come either from members of affiliated trade unions or from Socialist societies such as the ILP. Under Labour's new 1918 Constitution, however, individual membership was introduced and local parties were regularly urged to boost their numbers. The new category of individual membership could become particularly important during elections, as these were likely to be the most active volunteers. Individual members also provided vital extra funds to local parties from the various activities they organised. They also acted as envoys for the party, encouraging support from within the community amongst their acquaintances. On the other hand high individual membership did not necessarily guarantee electoral success, although it was a good indication of the strength of local parties during this period.

At the start of the period trade unions were the prevailing force within local parties, backing most of the elected Labour MPs in 1918, including the four successful ones in the Black Country. This continued during the 1920s, but historians are divided on whether it was to Labour's advantage. McKibbin, for instance, has few doubts, putting the party's post-war growth down to the trade union



link. Local parties, he claims, were “utterly dependent upon the unions as institutions and upon their officers and members as individuals”. He also stresses the importance of union finance to the party, as the ILP was in decline and individual membership remained low.(73)

This is also a view supported by Reynolds and Laybourn in their study of the Labour Party in the West Riding of Yorkshire. They maintain that the success of Labour was a consequence of the close association between the trade unions and the local Labour parties throughout the inter war years.(74) Laybourn claims that the persistence of unemployment, the General Strike defeat and the trade union legislation of 1927 strengthened union links with the Labour Party.(75) A similar view is taken by Riddell in his study of the Second Labour Government. He points out that despite efforts to increase individual membership, Labour failed to develop a mass party as envisaged in 1918.(76) As a result the trade unions still dominated the party, so that in 1929 the TUC provided Labour with 90 per cent of its finance and membership. Trade unions also sponsored a third of Labour’s MPs in the 1920s, as well as having a significant influence on party policy through the use of the block vote.(77)

One historian to be critical of Labour’s close links with the trade unions is Howard. He claims that growth was disappointing in the 1920s because the party failed to expand beyond its union roots. He notes the party’s decision to turn against ‘direct action’ by breaking with the Councils of Action and the unemployed groups led by Wal Hannington. This followed the formation of the British Communist Party in August 1920. Although Labour was successful in winning the Catholic Irish vote, he points to failures to expand support in the Anglican Church, amongst the middle class, the countryside and most important, perhaps, amongst the non unionised working classes.(78) Howard also points out that unions were able to control many local parties not only because they provided the money but also because they had the officials with the time for daytime party work. This led to many constituencies being controlled by a small number of activists, which Howard sees as a factor impeding Labour’s progress.(79)

Another historian to follow this line, with some modification, has been Savage. In his study of the Labour Party in Preston he accepts that the union link was important in 1918. The local party was controlled by skilled trade unions such as the ASE, who looked to Labour to restore their members pre-war status.(80) Savage points out that too much concern with ‘bread and butter’ issues meant that the local party failed to develop its organisation and began to lose support in the early 1920s.(81) He claims, however, that in the late 1920s the local party changed focus by building up support in the wards amongst non-union and women voters, by concentrating on neighbourhood issues such as



transport, housing, education and health. It led to the setting up of a Women's Section and increasing individual memberships and ward committees.(82)

Savage distinguishes four types of local parties at the end of the decade. Firstly there were those, particularly in London and the Home Counties, which had strong ward organisation due to the weakness of the unions. Then there were those which had shifted from a trade union to a ward basis. This was particularly the case in the Lancashire towns, where there was a tradition of women having a strong economic role. Then there were those Labour parties, as in Glasgow and Liverpool, which had a strong religious or ethnic influence. Finally there were those that remained under trade union influence, such as the coal mining constituencies and industrial towns like Coventry, Wolverhampton and Leicester. None of these had a high individual membership in the late 1920s.(83)

After the disastrous 1931 General Election, trade-union backed members again numerically dominated the Parliamentary Labour Party. The party's finances were further hit by the slump, however, as unemployment brought more losses of union affiliation fees. Improved organisation now became a critical factor for the Labour Party. Big efforts were made nationally to increase individual membership, with the 'Million New Members and Power' campaign launched in 1932.(84) In Preston, however, Savage claims that during the 1930s the unions again dominated the local party. This time it was the semi-skilled and unskilled public-sector workers, who had expanded with the growth of municipal enterprises.(85) The state of organisation within the local Labour parties in the Black Country will be a major element in seeking to explain the fortunes of the party.

The economic situation, particularly the impact of unemployment, was another important factor determining the growth of the Labour Party. The example of South Wales during this period reflects the link. The region had the highest rates of unemployment and became a solid Labour heartland with success even in the 1931 Election.(86) Yet high levels of employment during the First World War strengthened the trade unions and aided the Labour Party through the political fund. High unemployment might attract those out of work to Labour, but it could also hit the Party through the loss of union members and their affiliation fees. This was likely to be serious given that the trade unions provided the majority of the party's fund. Another consideration is the impact of the Trade Union Act of 1927, which followed the defeat of the General Strike. It meant that trade union members would have to 'contract in' rather than 'contract out' of their membership of the Labour Party.

In both Birmingham and the Black Country there were two periods when unemployment was exceptionally high. The first occasion was the post-war economic slump, as a downturn in war orders coincided with the decline of many of the Black Country's staple industries, such as coal mining, the iron industry and the domestic chain industry. Unemployment figures for Birmingham and Smethwick were to be higher in 1921 than for any year in the 1930s.(87) By the mid and late 1920s, however, there was steady economic growth in Birmingham and parts of the Black Country, due to the expansion of new industries, especially the motor car and its components. Nevertheless the staple industries in the region continued their decline, making unemployment a continuing problem in many areas.(88)

The Depression of the 1930s affected Birmingham and the Black Country less than similar industrial regions, as the motor car and electrical engineering industries were less seriously hit. Indeed by the middle of the decade these industries, together with the building boom, were leading Britain out of the Depression.(89) Whether Labour was affected by the levels of unemployment during this period will be one factor to be explored. It could be that unemployment divided the working class with many of those in work fearing that a Labour Government, following a radical economic programme, would be too much of a risk. The Labour Party in its turn was not anxious to seem to be too closely identified with the unemployed for fear of alienating those in work.

The role of personality is another important consideration. All parties recognised the value at elections of a candidate with a strong personality. In the case of some constituencies like Walsall it was also considered important that such a candidate should be local (90) The Labour MP with one of the strongest personalities, however, was an outsider. Frank Roberts, who represented West Bromwich for all but four of the inter-war years, came to the town as a union representative from Northampton. Another Labour MP who was to play a significant role in the region was another outsider, Oswald Mosley.(91) Not only was he a charismatic personality, but his wealth provided the Smethwick Labour Party with much needed funds. There was a similar situation with Oliver Baldwin, the MP for Dudley, whilst W.J.Brown, the MP for Wolverhampton West, was generously backed by his trade union. Yet these three MPs all split with the Labour Party in 1931. The impact of their departure on local parties will be a major consideration.

The role of another personality, the Labour leader and PM Ramsay MacDonald, who broke with the Party in setting up the National Government in 1931, will also be examined. The now accepted view of the fall of the Labour Government and its defeat in the 1931 General Election is that its demise had set



in well before those events. Neil Riddell, the most recent historian of these events, writes of declining support from trade unions, falling membership in the constituencies and a loss of morale amongst the PLP during the Government's term in office. Riddell does accept, however, that MacDonald was "a figure of hero worship" amongst many of the rank and file in the party. This support was based not on the achievements of his government, but on his campaigning record during General Elections. Many constituency parties were reluctant to condemn him and saddened to lose him. Riddell claims that, "such a cult of personality could not be wiped out overnight".(92) How far his role in forming the National Government in 1931 was a factor affecting the fortunes of local parties has to be considered.

The organisation and policies of Labour's opponents in the Black Country is another major consideration. The Liberal Party, although in decline during the whole of the inter-war period, could still play an important role in elections. Hart has pointed out that "electoral support for the Liberals in the country was as great as that for Labour until (and including) 1923".(93) In the Black Country the Wolverhampton East division was held by them throughout the inter-war years. The general feeling amongst Conservatives nationally was that a strong Liberal vote would split the anti-Socialist vote, letting in Labour. This led to the formation of many local anti-Socialist pacts in municipal elections during the inter-war period.(94) The extent to which these affected the Labour Party in the Black Country will be considered. The 1929 General Election appeared to confirm the Conservative fears as the high Liberal poll seemed to have opened the way for a Labour Government. With the formation of the National Government in 1931, however, Labour was generally faced by only one candidate in parliamentary elections. The extent to which this affected Labour's performance in the General Elections of the 1930s will be considered.

For most of the inter-war years the Conservative leader was Stanley Baldwin. In a recent study Williamson stresses that his main concern was to integrate the new mass working-class electorate into the system. He had three strategies for doing this. One was to divide and defeat the Liberals so that the anti-Labour vote would not be split. Next he sought to strengthen the organisation of his Party, especially by appealing to newly enfranchised women voters. Finally he sought to develop Conservative policies in order to attract the working-class voter. Two of his policies were to have a big impact on the Labour Party during this period. One was his support for social expenditure, especially the council house programme, and the other was Protection, which having backfired in the 1923 Election became a key Conservative policy in the 1930s.(95)



Pugh has pointed to two electoral factors, which greatly helped the Conservatives in the inter-war years. In the 1920s in particular he claims that they benefited from three party politics, due to the ending of the pre-1914 Lib-Lab pact. It enabled the Conservatives to win the 1922 Election with 5 per cent fewer votes than they secured in the disastrous 1906 Election. It also meant that in the 1924 Election Labour gained a slightly higher percentage of the poll than in 1923, but lost 42 seats, due to the decline of the Liberal vote.(96) Another advantage for the Conservatives was the redistribution of seats in 1918, which recognised suburban growth, where much of their strength lay.(97) With a predominantly working-class electorate, however, Pugh recognises the importance which the Conservatives put on acquiring an efficient electoral machine. This involved employing full time agents, who were involved in raising funds and in ensuring that the party obtained its full support on election days.(98)

McKibbin has shown how during the 1920s the Conservatives “assembled a formidable and unprecedented coalition of social groups”. Much of this was based on appealing to those who felt threatened by the organised working class. There was, on the one hand, a growing suburban middle-class, whose views were articulated in the Daily Express and the Daily Mail.(99) He points to the growth of a middle-class consciousness, which was based on a stereotype of the working class as manual workers “in well organised trades with aggressive trade unions”.(100) There was also the female vote, which tended towards the Conservatives, as the organised world of the working class was seen as “masculine, sectional and collectivist”.(101) Finally there were the working-class Conservatives, whom McKibbin puts into three categories. Firstly there were those whose vote was a deferential one. Then there were the non-unionised, who felt isolated when organised labour developed muscle. Finally there were those employed in smaller workplaces, where there was a sense of class collaboration.(102)

Pugh also defines two types of working-class Conservatives. Firstly there were the deferential Conservatives, who accepted governance by his social superiors. This was particularly true of rural areas, but also in wards where there was a combination of the wealthy and the dependent poor. Secondly there were the pragmatic Conservatives, who recognised, often through their work, that it was in their best self-interest to support the Conservatives. Tariff Reform can be seen as an example of this.(103)

In a recent article Pugh further emphasises the strength of working-class Conservatism, by defining it as “hostility towards the state and suspicion of improving legislation, enthusiasm for the monarchy, the empire, the union with Ireland and militant Protestantism, and in the tendency to blame immigrants and foreigners for Britain’s ills”. It is Pugh’s contention that Labour had to adapt to these Conservative traits in order to achieve power. They only fully succeeded in doing this during the Second World War, which explains their success in 1945.(104)

Gardner, in his study of Wolverhampton Conservatives, has shown that the Black Country was not unreceptive to Conservative policies. Although Wolverhampton was an industrial town with a predominantly working-class population, there was also a strong middle class. Indeed the two Conservatives candidates during this period were local businessmen Sir Alfred Bird and his son Robert, whose work gave them some knowledge of the working class. Gardner claims that in the West Wolverhampton constituency a mass Conservative membership was built up after 1922. The members were predominantly female and middle class, which reflected the more diverse character of this constituency, as compared with other Black Country seats. Gardner puts the appeal of the party down not so much to a matter of belief, but more to its past record, its general fitness to be trusted in government, its immediate programme and the proposals of the opposition.(105)

## 5. THE AIMS AND METHODOLOGY OF THE THESIS

The fortunes of the Labour Party across the Black Country during the inter-war years have lacked a thorough study. The first aim of this thesis will be to remedy this situation by providing a constituency by constituency account of the party's performance in the region with special reference to the General Elections. The second aim will be to examine the factors behind Labour’s performance. In particular the intention will be to analyse the reasons for the party’s breakthrough in 1918, its achievements down to 1929 and the factors behind Labour’s relative failure to build on its support through the 1930s. A third aim will be to compare the position of the Labour Party in the Black Country with the situation firstly in nearby Birmingham and then in the country as a whole. The intention here will be to illustrate the distinctive nature of the party’s performance in the region during this period. Finally the aim will be to see how far a study of the Labour Party in the Black Country during this period will challenge the existing historiography of the party.



The topic will be approached in a chronological manner, with the dividing point for each chapter being one of the General Elections of the period. Each chapter will contain a brief account of the national situation including the relevant historiography for that section. There will then be a short account and explanation of the situation in Birmingham, which will be followed by a longer section on the Black Country. This will start with the economic and political background for that period and be followed by a constituency by constituency account of the electoral position of the Labour Party. The order for this will depend on the importance of the constituency within that period of time. Each chapter will have its own conclusion.

One of the main problems in researching this subject is the paucity of source material. Two major sources will be used, but even these have their limitations. One is the press both national and local. In each case it was generally unfavourable to the Labour Party. The anti-Labour bias of the local press ranged from the populist attitude of the Birmingham Mail and some of the region's weeklies to the more sophisticated tone of the Birmingham Post, which was the voice of Unionism in the West Midlands. There were some local exceptions to this situation. Liberal papers, for instance, such as the Birmingham Gazette and the Wolverhampton Express and Star, saw the Labour Party as an ally of the Liberals against the Conservatives at the start of the period. This situation had disappeared by 1931. There were also a few neutral local papers such as the Smethwick Telephone, which were prepared to give Labour equal treatment at elections. Finally there was one paper, which was totally supportive of the Labour Party, the Town Crier. This was a Birmingham weekly, which was backed financially by local Labour supporters.

The other main source is local Labour Party records, but even these are limited. The only Black Country constituency party records available are those for Wolverhampton and Walsall. Records are also available for the city of Birmingham. This leaves many gaps, however, which the press only partially fills. Other Labour Party records will be used such as the NEC Minutes, which have some value when local issues impacted on the national position as, for instance, during by-elections. The Labour Party's Annual Report has a similar value, although this does contain one important source in that it lists the number of individual party members, which each constituency enrolled annually. This provides an indicator of the strength of local organisation, although not necessarily of electoral success. Finally there are a limited selection of party election manifestos, contemporary accounts and memoirs.

Election manifestos, for instance, are particularly useful for showing which issues local candidates wanted to stress in their constituencies.

## FOOTNOTES

- 1 The 1918 Representation of the People Act gave the vote to all men over 21 subject to a 6-month residence. Women over 30, who qualified for the municipal vote, were now allowed the parliamentary vote. This meant that there were an extra 4 million male voters, who were either sons living at home or those living in furnished rooms. 78 per cent of women over 30 were enfranchised. These were mainly the wives of enfranchised males. Tanner, D. Political Change and the Labour Party 1900-1918 (1990), p.387.
- 2 In 1914 there were 4,145,000 trade unionists, of which 2,682,357 were affiliated to the TUC. In 1918 there were 6,533,000 trade unionists, of which 5,283,676 were affiliated. Pelling, H. A History of British Trade Unionism (1963), p.262.
- 3 Labour's programme for the 1918 General Election, 'Labour and the New Social Order', which was drafted by Sidney Webb, called for "the socialisation of industry". More specifically, it called for "the common ownership of the nation's land" and "the immediate Nationalisation of Railways, Mines, and the production of Electrical Power". Cole, G.D.H. A History of the Labour Party from 1914 (1948), pp.56-60.
- 4 Dunabin, for instance, neglects the achievements of the Labour Party in the Black Country during the inter-war years in his coverage of the West Midland region. The assumption here is that Conservatism, in the form of Chamberlain's Unionism, dominated. Dunbabin, J.P.P. 'British Elections in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Centuries: A Regional Approach'. English Historical Review 95, April 1980.
- 5 For a comparison of Birmingham and the Black Country at the start of this period, see Pelling, H. Social Geography of British Elections 1885-1910 (1967), pp.175-8.
- 6 For the economic situation in the Black Country before 1914 see Allen, G.C. The Industrial Development of Birmingham and the Black Country 1960-1927 (1928).
- 7 Jones, G. Borough Politics: a study of the Wolverhampton Town Council, 1888-1964 (1969), pp.20-21.



- 8 Dissent in Birmingham had traditionally been a middle-class movement centred on the Unitarianism movement, as exemplified by the Chamberlain family.
- 9 The link between Nonconformity and Labour has been shown in research in 1960 into the voting habits of those working class Nonconformists, who had reached voting age before 1914. They split 4:1 against the Conservatives in their voting habits, compared with an even split by working-class Anglicans. Butler, D. and Stokes, D. Political Change in Britain (1971 edn), pp.166-7.
- 10 In 1910, for instance, the Manchester Guardian described the Worcestershire North seat, which became the Stourbridge division in 1918, as “largely a Black Country constituency ... The men employed in the iron, the glass and the chemical works live in small and crowded towns, appallingly dreary and ill-built”. Manchester Guardian 25 January 1910. Quoted in Pelling, H. (1967), pp.185-6.
- 11 Reynolds, J. and Laybourn, K. Labour Heartland: The History of the Labour Party in West Yorkshire during the Inter-War Years, 1918-1939 (1987), p.151.
- 12 The authors point to the example of the City of Leeds Labour Party, which had 3-4,000 individual members during the 1920s, but 15-16,000 affiliated trade union members. Ibid., p.151.
- 13 In Bradford, for instance, one third of local councillors were trade union officials in 1929. Ibid., p.51.
- 14 The Labour Party also won 6 seats out of 9 in the 1919 municipal elections. Savage, M. The Dynamics of Working Class Politics: The Labour Movement in Preston, 1880-1940 (1987), p.162.
- 15 Ibid., p.163. As an example of this Savage points out that in 1924 the trade unions provided 56 per cent of the £245 raised locally, compared to only 22 per cent of £168 in 1928 for the ‘Bid for Victory’ campaign. Of the rest, 34 per cent came from individuals, 24 per cent from the women’s section and 10 per cent from neighbourhood activities. Ibid., p.174.
- 16 Savage claims that women were alienated due to the 1930 reform of the National Insurance Act, known as the Anomalies Act. This limited the unemployment insurance that married women could claim. Ibid., p.181.
- 17 Ibid., p.200.
- 18 Thorpe, A. ‘J.H.Thomas and the Rise of Labour in Derby, 1880-1945’. Midland History 40 (1990), pp.111-28.

- 19 Derby had a powerful Nonconformist tradition, which Thorpe claims was a great advantage to Labour. Support switched from the Liberals to Labour in the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century. Ibid., pp.117-8.
- 20 Thorpe points to the predominance within the local party of the unions at Derby's three main employers:- The NUR with the railways, the AEU at Rolls Royce and the TGWU (formerly the Workers' Union) at British Celanese. Ibid., p.115.
- 21 Hastings, R.P. 'The Birmingham Labour Movement, 1918-1945'. Midland History, 5 (1979-1980), pp.78-92. This is based on his thesis:- Hastings, R.P. 'The Birmingham Labour Movement 1927-1945' M.A. Thesis, University of Birmingham (1959).
- 22 Hopkins, E. 'Industrial Change and Life at Work in Birmingham 1850-1914'. Midland History XXV (2002), pp.112-129. Hopkins, E. 'Working Class Life in Birmingham between the Wars'. Midland History XV (1990), pp.129-150.
- 23 Hopkins points out that there were nine firms in Birmingham in 1900, employing more than 1,000 workers. The biggest were Cadburys – 6,000, Dunlops – 4,000, Nettlefords – 3,000, Buttons – 2,000, Austin Motors – 2,000 and Elkingtons – 2,000. Hopkins, E. (2002), P118. Hopkins is indebted for his figures to the VCH Warwick's. VII, p.168.
- 24 Hopkins points out that in 1938 the population of Birmingham had risen 38 per cent since 1901 to 1,048,000. Of this population 86 per cent was working class, although less than 20 per cent now lived in the central wards, where population had dropped 22.5 per cent in the period. Hopkins, E. (1990), p.130.
- 25 Briggs points to a 40 per cent increase in the total insured population of Birmingham between 1923 and 1937, compared to a national figure of 22 per cent. Briggs, A. History of Birmingham Volume 2 (1952), pp.278-90.
- 26 Both authors point, for instance, to the figures for 1938 that there were still over 10,000 factories in the city employing less than 20. Briggs, A. (1953), p6. Hopkins, E. (1990), p.138.
- 27 Boughton, J. 'Working-Class Conservatism and the Rise of Labour: A Case Study of Birmingham in the 1920s'. The Historian 59 (1998), pp.16-20.
- 28 Davies, R.S.W. 'Differentiation in the Working Class, Class Consciousness and the Development of the Labour Party in Liverpool'. PhD. Thesis. Liverpool John Moore's University (1993).
- 29 Wolverhampton has been covered by:- Jones, G. (1969). Walsall has been covered by:- Dean, K.J. Town and Westminster (1971). Both authors have used the local Labour Party Minutes.



- 30 Barnsby, G. Socialism in Birmingham and the Black Country 1850-1939 (1998).
- 31 Gardner, K.D. 'The Structure, Organisation and Electoral Performance of the Conservative Party in Wolverhampton 1918-1939'. M.Phil. Thesis, University of Wolverhampton (1994).
- 32 The Labour breakthrough in the region in 1918, for instance, gets no recognition in the section on that Election. Rolfe, K.W.D. 'Tories, Tariffs and Elections: the West Midlands in English Politics 1918-35'. Ph.D. Thesis, University of Cambridge (1974).
- 33 Mining in Kingswinford was mainly in the Old Hill and Rowley Regis area, but declined rapidly after the 1921 dispute due to flooded pits. In Walsall mining remained significant during the inter-war years, having some influence on the local Labour Party. Newer, larger pits, such as Baggeridge and Hamstead were on the fringe of the region.
- 34 According to Turner the 'coupon' was only used against 'pacifist' Labour MPs, so that in the South Wales coalfield Labour was largely unopposed. However, "few new Labour candidates were given a free rein by the Coalition". 36 Labour candidates were exempted from 'couponed' opposition, but 20 were opposed by Conservatives and 12 by Liberals. In contests against 'couponed' candidates Labour secured only 30 per cent of the vote, whilst against those not couponed the vote was 40 per cent. Turner, J. British Politics and the Great War: Coalition and Conflict, 1915-1918 (1992), pp.410-2.
- 35 Taylor, E. The Working Class Movement in the Black Country, 1863-1914 PhD. Thesis, University of Keele (1974).
- 36 Benson, J. 'Black Country History and Labour History' in Midland History (1990) Vol.XV, pp.100-11.
- 37 McKibbin, R. 'Why was there no Marxism in Great Britain?' English Historical Review (1984), p.298.
- 38 The four 'heavy industrial' firms were Armstrong Whitworth, Vickers, John Brown and Stewarts and Lloyd, along with the Royal Ordnance Factories and GKN. Ibid., p.301.
- 39 Ibid., pp.305-6.
- 40 Ibid., pp.311-3.
- 41 Ibid., pp.307.
- 42 Ibid., pp.303.

- 43 According to Tanner amongst other factors, which attracted the working class to the Conservatives, were their organisation, tactics, Liberal divisions and their mishandling of the economy in the 1890s. Tanner, D. (1990), p.20.
- 44 The only Black Country seat, which the Liberals failed to capture in 1906, was Kingswinford, but the swing to them since 1900 was less than 4 per cent. Pelling, H. (1967), p.187.
- 45 Wolverhampton East and North Worcestershire were retained by the Liberals in both the 1910 Elections, whilst Dudley was held in January but lost in December. Pelling gives the attraction of Tariff Reform in the Black Country, given the economic situation there. *Ibid.*, pp.187-8
- 46 Tanner classifies parts of working-class Lancashire, the West Midlands, London and the South Coast ports as working-class Tory. Tanner, D. (1990), p.21.
- 47 The Gladstone-MacDonald pact, which was agreed in 1903, mainly affected Tory working-class seats. It did not apply to Scotland and was unpopular in the North East and Yorkshire, due to the strength of anti-Progressive Liberals. Thorpe, A. A History of the British Labour Party (1997), p.23. Three-fifths of the Labour candidates stood in Lancashire, Yorkshire and the North East. There were only five in the Midlands. Of the 29 of candidates elected, two-thirds sat for northern English seats. *Ibid.*, pp.18-19. In Scotland, where the pact did not apply, only 2 out of 12 Labour candidates were elected. See Cook, C. 'Labour's Electoral Base' in The Labour Party edited by Cook C. and Taylor, I. (1980), p.84.
- 48 The impetus for this reform programme came after Asquith took over the premiership in 1908. This was not so much because of Asquith, himself, but due to his appointment of Lloyd George as Chancellor of the Exchequer. *Ibid.*, pp.45-6.
- 49 Clarke, P.F. Lancashire and the New Liberalism (1971). As part of the 'rise of Labour / decline of Liberals' debate, a number of historians have stressed the strength of the Liberal Party in the years prior to 1914. Consequently they have put most emphasis on the Asquith / Lloyd George war time split to explain the decline of the Liberals and the rise of Labour. See Bentley, M. The Climax of Liberal Politics: British Liberalism in Theory and Practice 1868-1918 (1987). For further information on this debate see Laybourn, K. 'The Rise of Labour and the Decline of Liberalism: The State of the Debate' in History, 80, 259 (1995).
- 50 Douglas, R. 'Labour in Decline, 1910-14' in Brown, K.D. Essays in Anti Labour History (1974), pp.116-9.



- 51 McKibbin acknowledges that Labour lost four by-elections between 1910-14, but points out that three were in Midland mining seats, where there was a tradition for Lib-Labism and the Labour organisation was weak. He points out, however, that Labour fought seven by-elections for the first time, coming a close second in three. In five by-elections, which they refought, Labour support increased on 1910. In municipal elections Labour made the following gains:- 23 in 1909, 33 in 1910, 78 in 1911, 42 in 1912 and 85 in 1913. McKibbin, R. The Evolution of the Labour Party, 1910-1924 (1974), pp.81-6.
- 52 Savage, M. and Miles, A. The Remaking of the British Working Class 1840-1940 (1994), p.78.
- 53 Opposition to the pact came from the left. In 1912 Lansbury resigned his seat to fight a by-election in protest at Labour's policy on women's suffrage and its general support for Liberal legislation. Tanner, D. (1990), p.72.
- 54 Ibid., pp.343-4.
- 55 There was some hostility in the party to the Trade Union Act of 1913, whilst troops were used during the pre-war strikes and trade union leaders, such as Tom Mann and James Larkin were prosecuted. Ibid., pp.61-3.
- 56 Lloyd George planned to include land reforms in his Budget, from which he hoped to launch an election campaign. Fifty Liberals rebelled in the lobbies, forcing Lloyd George to withdraw his proposals. Income tax was reduced instead to the benefit of the middle class. Ibid., p.68.
- 57 Ibid., pp.318-9.
- 58 Laybourn, K. (1995), p.221. Laybourn claims that Tanner ignores local election results in the West Riding after 1906. He also ignores Labour's organisation in the region, such as institutions like the Clarion movement, the Labour Church and socialist Sunday schools.
- 59 Tanner quotes from the diary of Beatrice Webb in 1914 that "the solid phalanx of miners and textiles don't want the Labour members to cut loose from the Liberal Party, and MacDonald knows it". Tanner also lists a number of other trade unions, which refused to finance Labour candidates. Ibid., pp.321-2. Tanner also makes a thorough analysis of Labour's position with regard to a 1915 General Election. In June 1914 the NEC was presented with a list of 117 "Present and Prospective" constituencies. There were, however, only 59 sanctioned candidates by January 1915, of whom only 16 were likely to be facing Liberal opponents. There were another 17 unallocated candidates, who were not likely to break the pattern. Ibid., pp.325-33.

- 60 “The Franchise Act of 1884 went almost all the way to universal male suffrage”. Butler, D.E. The Electoral System in Britain since 1918. (1963), p.5. “By 1885 the British electoral system had assumed much the same form as it has today”. O’Leary, The Elimination of Corrupt Practices in British Elections 1868-1911 (1962), p.179. Quoted in Blewett, N. ‘The Franchise in the U.K. 1885-1918’. Past and Present (1965), p.29.
- 61 Ibid., p.31.
- 62 Working-class voters were also disadvantaged by the fact that they often moved residence with their jobs. It then took two to three years to get back on the register. It has been estimated that a quarter of the electorate in working-class districts of London was in this position. Chamberlain, C. ‘The Growth of Support for the Labour Party in Britain’. British Journal of Sociology 24, (1973), pp.474-89. Given the residency qualification, registration was a key factor in the constituencies. This put a premium on having an effective constituency agent. Matthew, H.C.G., McKibbin, R. and Kay, J.A. ‘The Franchise Factor in the Rise of the Labour Party’ in English Historical Review October 1976, p.731.
- 63 Blewett, N. (1965), pp.44-6.
- 64 Matthew, H.C.G., McKibbin, R. and Kay, J.A. (1976), p.726.
- 65 Pelling, H. (1967), pp.419-20.
- 66 Clarke, P.F. ‘Liberals, Labour and the Franchise’ English Historical Review, (1977), pp582-589.
- 67 In 1924 the Liberals secured 18 per cent of the vote and 40 seats, whilst in 1929 their 23 per cent brought them only 59 seats. The Labour Party, itself, won only 58 seats in 1918 on 21 per cent of the vote. Hart, M. ‘The Liberals, the War and the Franchise’ in English Historical Review XCVII, (1982), p.831.
- 68 Tanner, D. (1990), pp.119-20. Tanner claims that if the plural vote were excluded, the working class would comprise 76 per cent of the electorate. Moreover in many working-class seats the number of plural votes would be limited.
- 69 Labour had only 17 full-time agents in 1912, whilst in 1915 the Liberals had around 300. By 1918 the Labour total had risen to 80, as in 1912 the national party agreed to pay 25 per cent of agents’ salaries. Laybourn, K. (1995), p.213.



- 70 Labour's poor performance in by-elections between 1906-1910 is seen as the main reason for the continuation of the pact. Out of 10 by-elections that Labour fought 8 were three-cornered fights, in which Labour came bottom of the poll in 5. Thorpe, A. (1997), p.24.
- 71 The first party political broadcasts were made during the 1924 General Election. Baldwin quickly became the master of the radio, using it skilfully during his administration 1924-29, especially at the time of the General Strike. "His technique reached its perfected form in the first broadcast of 1935 election campaign". Williamson, P. Stanley Baldwin (1999), pp83-5. The circulation of the London morning papers rose from 5.4 million in 1920 to 10.5 million in 1939. The Daily Herald, for instance, increased its circulation from 211,000 in 1921 to 2 million in 1935. The radicalisation of the Daily Mirror began in 1935, when its circulation was 950,000. By 1939 its circulation had reached 1.5 million. Seymore-Ure, C. 'The Press and the Party System between the Wars' in Peele, G. and Cook, C. (Eds.) The Politics of Reappraisal 1918-1939 (1975), pp.232-57.
- 72 Women made up 43 per cent of the electorate before the 1928 Representation of the People Act, but afterwards they made up the majority in 85 per cent of the seats. Rolfe, K.W.D. (1975), p.211.
- 73 McKibbin, R. The Evolution of the Labour Party 1910-1924 (1974), pp.161-2.
- 74 Reynolds, J. and Laybourn, K. (1987), pp.50-1.
- 75 "It was as though the failure of industrial action prompted the trade-union movement to throw its full weight behind the political ambitions of the Labour Party". Laybourn, K. The Rise of Labour: The British Labour Party 1890-1979 (1988), pp.62-3.
- 76 Riddell compares the situation in Britain to that in Germany, where the SPD had succeeded in dominating the social life of the working classes. He puts the numbers already affiliated to trade unions as one factor, along with unemployment and the party's lack of success nationally. He also notes the working classes were unwilling to spend their precious leisure time on political activities. Riddell, N. Labour in Crisis: The Second Labour Government, 1929-31 (1999), pp.16-7.
- 77 Riddell does note, however, that the percentage was the lowest in the movement's history at that time. Ibid., pp.9-10.
- 78 Howard claims that Henderson had built links in 1918-9 with various pressure groups opposed to the Lloyd George Coalition, but the Labour Party failed to make use of them because of "the hesitant attitude of the leadership". Howard, C. 'Expectations born to Death: Local Labour

Expansion in the 1920s' in Winter, J. (Ed) The Working Class in Modern British History: Essays in Honour of Henry Pelling (1985), pp.66-73.

- 79 Howard gives Leicester and Coventry as local parties, which were controlled by unions, as well as those in the cotton, coal and steel belts. The Wolverhampton and Smethwick parties are named as being run by a handful of activists. Ibid., p.78.
- 80 Savage, M. (1987), p.162. Savage describes this kind of policy as "patriarchal economic Labourism".
- 81 Ibid., pp.172-3. He claims that women in particular were disaffected by Labour. In 1923 the Women's Citizen's Association, in co-operation with the Conservatives, mobilised their vote against Labour, with two of their three candidates winning municipal seats.
- 82 Ibid., pp.177-78. Savage claims that the party was helped in its concentration on neighbourhood politics by the stable population of the 1920s and the growth neighbourhood institutions like clubs and the Co-op. Ibid., pp.195.
- 83 Ibid., pp.196-8.
- 84 The constituencies with the highest individual membership in 1932 were Woolwich East and West with 5,505 and Romford with 3,806. In 1933 the figures were respectively 4,013 and 3,985. Labour Party Annual Report 1933, p.31, Labour Party Annual Report 1934, p.42.
- 85 Savage sees this as a national trend with an increase in membership of the NUGMW between 1926, when a third or 110,000 of its members were in public sector work, and 1938 when the figure was 2000,000 or a half. Savage, M. (1987), p.199.
- 86 In Glamorgan, for instance, the Labour vote was up from its 1929 level of 158,754 to 165,508. There were increases in every constituency. Stevenson, J. and Cook, C. Britain in the Depression: Society and Politics 1929-39 (1994 ed), p.313.
- 87 Unemployment peaked in Birmingham in August 1931 at 76,000 or 17.7 per cent of the workforce. Hopkins, E. (1990). This compares with a total of 93,019 in June 1921. Birmingham Gazette, 9 June 1921. Unemployment in Smethwick peaked at 8,821, "the highest since 1921". Smethwick Telephone, 3 October 1931.
- 88 Allen in giving the unemployment figures for 1927 has Birmingham with the lowest at 6.8 per cent, Wolverhampton 7.9 per cent, Oldbury 7.9 per cent, Smethwick 8.4 per cent and Darlaston 8.6 per cent. This was mainly on account of the motor industry and its component trades. The highest



figures were Wednesbury at 16.1 per cent, Brierley Hill 14.3 per cent, Bilston 13.9 per cent and Walsall 13.1 per cent. These were mainly areas affected by the decline in the heavy iron and steel trades. Allen, G.C. (1928), p.384.

- 89 Not all historians believe that Birmingham's unemployment figures for the 1930s were a true reflection of those out of work in the city. In particular it has been pointed out that the figures do not include a large number of unregistered women workers. Hill, B.K. 'Women and Unemployment in Birmingham 1918-1939' Midland History XXVII (2002), pp.130-45.
- 90 A local candidate was returned in all the Walsall elections during this period, except for the 1938 by-election.
- 91 Mosley was not a complete outsider, being the son of a Staffordshire family of "respectable antiquity". He was educated at Winchester and then Sandhurst. Rolfe K.W.D. (1974), p.125.
- 92 Riddell points to local organisations naming buildings after MacDonald. Riddell, N. (1999), p.210.
- 93 Hart even suggests that but for the recent divisions in the Liberal leadership "the possibility of an Asquith ministry, not an absurd idea as it was, would have become a practical certainty sometime in 1924". Hart, M. (1982), pp.822-3.
- 94 Reynolds and Laybourn, for instance, write that in West Yorkshire anti-Socialist pacts in local elections affected Labour's performance in Bradford and Huddersfield. Reynolds, J. and Laybourn, K. (1987), p.2.
- 95 Williamson, P. (1999).
- 96 The Conservatives secured 38 per cent of the poll in all the Elections in the 1920s except for 1924, when they gained 48 per cent. The Conservative-Liberal-Labour share of the vote changed from 4-3-3 in the early 1920s to 4-2-4 by the end of the decade. The Conservatives had successfully blocked PR or the Alternative Vote in 1917-18, whilst MacDonald resisted Liberal attempts to revive the matter at the Speaker's Conference in 1930. Pugh, M. The Making of Modern British Politics 1867-1939 (1982), pp.236-40.
- 97 Had the 1918 redistribution occurred in time for the December 1910 Election the Conservatives would have gained 34 seats and Liberals/Labour 8 seats, with the Irish losing 5. The Conservatives also greatly benefited from the 16 university seats, which was an increase of 4. Ibid., pp.240-3.
- 98 Pugh points out that whilst Liberal agents disappeared and Labour relied upon trade union officials, the Conservatives trained some 352 agents between 1924-1937. Ibid., pp.243-4

- 99 McKibbin points out that Conservative membership in the mid 1920s rose to 700,000, which was double that of the Labour Party. McKibbin, R. 'Class and Conventional Wisdom: The Conservative Party and the Public in Inter-War Britain' in McKibbin, R. The Ideologies of Class: Social Relations in Britain, 1880-1950 (1990), pp.265-7.
- 100 Ibid., p.271.
- 101 Pugh has explored the role of women in reviving Conservative organisation in the years before and after the First World War, especially through the Primrose League. Pugh, M. The Tories and the People 1880-1935 (1982), pp.178-80. Benson gives figures showing that in 1910 The League claimed 2 million members, which was 25 per cent of the electorate. 90 per cent were members of the working class and many were women. Benson, J. The Working Class in Britain 1850-1939 (1989), p.186.
- 102 McKibbin, R. (1990), p.285. Trade union membership, which reached 8.35 million in 1920, of whom 6.4 million were affiliated to the TUC. In 1933 the total had fallen to 4.4 million with 3.3 million affiliated to the TUC, before recovering to 6.3million and 4.87 million by 1939. Pelling, H. (1963), p.262. A number of historians have commented on the numbers of non-unionised workers in this period. Benson, for instance, has calculated that in the metal and engineering industries 56 per cent were unionised in 1920, 27 per cent in 1931 and 36 per cent in 1939. Benson, J. (1989), p.176.
- 103 Pugh, M. (1982), pp.84-8. Not all historians see the working-class Conservative vote as a deferential one. Parkin, for instance, has claimed that to vote Labour required a certain amount of deviancy. Voters needed to live in a working-class community with collectivist values and to have a working-class value system at their workplace. Parkin, F. 'Working-class Conservatives: A Theory of Political Deviance' British Journal of Sociology Volume 18 No 3 (1967) Chamberlain rejects this theory as it assumes that voting Labour suggests supporting a party, which was hostile to the dominating values. This was not the case with the British Labour Party. He does suggest, however, that post-1918 the working class in Britain was more shielded from the dominant political culture. Chamberlain, C. (1973), pp.474-89.
- 104 In addition Pugh defines the social side of working-class Conservatism as "a preoccupation with the public house, scurrilous newspapers, gambling, football, horse-racing, boxing and music hall".



Pugh. M. 'The Rise of Labour and the Political Culture of Conservatism, 1890-1945'. History 87, 288 (2002), pp.514-37.

105 Gardner, K.D. (1994), p.140.

## CHAPTER 1 - THE 1918 GENERAL ELECTION

### A. NATIONAL DEVELOPMENTS

The 1918 General Election has been seen as a distinctive milestone in the emergence of the Labour Party as the second political force in the country. At the outbreak of the First World War Labour's position in parliament was still very dependent on its pact with the Liberals, which would probably have continued had an election been called in 1915.(1) In 1918, however, the party endorsed 361 candidates, winning 20.8 per cent of the vote and 57 seats, which made Labour the main opposition to the Lloyd George Coalition.(2)

Historians are generally agreed that the First World War caused huge social and political changes, but there have been disagreements over the extent to which it led to greater working-class consciousness and political radicalism. For the first time the government chose to consult and work with trade union leaders, who were put on committees and involved in labour policies. There was also much state intervention, especially in munitions work, whilst transport and the coalmines were taken over by the government itself. Under the Defence of the Realm Act strikes and restrictive practices on government contracts were made illegal. The unions also agreed to 'the dilution of labour', which allowed the lower skilled, often women, to do skilled work. A Committee on Production was set up, which fixed wages. These tended at first to lag behind price increases. Finally leaving certificates and exemption badges were used, particularly after conscription was introduced, to restrict job mobility and secure enlistment.

This situation caused much tension in the workplace, leading to an upsurge in rank and file militancy. In the engineering industry, in particular, a shop steward movement developed, which was frequently at odds with the union leadership. There were a number of disputes, especially during 1917-18. The main causes of the trouble were government moves to extend 'dilution' into private work, restrict the mobility of skilled labour and reduce exemptions from conscription.(3)

Some historians have seen the unrest amongst the rank and file as exemplifying the growth of working-class consciousness. Others, however, see it as an exception at a time when most workers were patriotic, with fewer days lost in strikes than in 1913, which was the calmest of the pre-war years. Marwick has been one historian to link the "extreme working-class discontent of 1917" to such factors as bad housing conditions, rising prices and declining real wages, at a time when union leaders were in the "embrace" of the Government.(4)



One contemporary, who later became the Labour Party historian, G.D.H.Cole, thought that the industrial unrest, particularly the rank and file movement, marked an end to working-class fragmentation. He also stressed the importance of the impact that the Russian Revolution had in providing confidence and ideology.(5) He wrote that the war years “made an immense difference to trade union opinion... most of (the leaders) were no longer hostile to Socialism of a kind”. According to Cole it led in 1918 to the adoption of a ‘Socialist’ Constitution with its call for “the common ownership of the means of production”.(6)

Many later historians have followed a similar line. Cronin, for instance, has written the following of the situation in 1918. “Not only were workers demanding higher wages, greater control of the workplace, the nationalisation of coal and other industries and a host of social reforms connected with housing, health and employment; in addition they exhibited a frightening taste for “direct action” in implementing these goals, a distrust of the political process and a marked independence from any formal leadership”.(7)

Winter has written of the emergence of a more confident and less deferential working class with barriers breaking down as skills became diluted and pay differentials narrowed. He has put much emphasis on the War Emergency Workers’ National Committee as a body boosting socialism. It is described as “the only independent voice of the united British Labour movement after August 1914.” Meeting under the leadership of Henderson, it represented the interests of the working class throughout the war years on issues like prices, housing, rent control, benefits and pensions for soldiers.(8) Winter even claims that it prevented “the major and irreversible schism over the cause and conduct of the war, which plagued continental Labour”.(9) According to Turner the Committee “helped to make Labour a class party, rather than the largely industrial party, which it had been before the war”.(10)

Not all historians have seen the impact of the war in this way. McKibbin, for instance, claims that the war “brought no concerted move to the left”.(11) He sees industrial disputes such as those in engineering as having “a marginal effect on the Labour movement”. Instead he stresses the view that union leaders moved to the right, attacking the left in both the unions and the Labour Party.(12) He sees the new Labour Constitution as a consequence of this, giving the Party Conference, dominated by the trade unions, the power to elect the NEC. Nevertheless he accepts that it was the union dominated NEC that drew up Clause 4 and the 1918 Manifesto, with its call for the socialisation of industry.(13) He



concludes that “if the war did not necessarily mean the defeat of socialism in Britain, it did mean the defeat of socialists”.(14)

Tanner also denies the emergence of a single working-class consciousness during the war years. He sees a diffuse working class, which had no uniform class experience and was patriotic in its support of the war effort. He points out that there were “some changes but not a complete rupture with the past”.(15) Tanner claims that government intervention was “piecemeal and cautious”, due to union strength. With a shortage of labour, skilled workers were often able to resist the “dilution of labour” at a local level.(16) Furthermore he recognises that “the material well being and living standards of those engaged in war work, and particularly the unskilled, were far better in 1918 than in 1914. Earnings were more regular, overtime more common, and supplementary work for family members was more freely available”.(17) Strike action, he points out, “fell away” with fewer days lost to strike action during the war than in any year since 1909.(18)

Nevertheless skilled workers frequently resented improvements secured by the unskilled. Tanner claims that strikes in engineering, ironfounding and boot and shoe work in 1917-18 were aimed in general at preserving differentials.(19) He accepts, however, that Labour’s agitation on behalf of the working class for higher allowances for dependants and control of rents and food prices helped bring about a situation of “working-class awareness” but not class consciousness.(20) Tanner’s fairly positive picture of industrial relations seems true for the early years of the war, but by the winter of 1917-18 there was a different atmosphere with war weariness and more strike activity.(21)

In 1914 the Labour Party had appeared to split when MacDonald resigned the leadership of the PLP over his opposition to the war. MacDonald’s stand was backed by the ILP, but the majority of the Labour Party backed Henderson, who took over the leadership. Henderson supported the war, fearing isolation and charges of defeatism if Labour opposed it. He realised that the party had to stay close to public opinion, support the war, but be critical of the government’s failures. There was, however, no major split in the Labour Party during the war years in spite of a number of divisive issues.(22)

Henderson became a member of Asquith’s Coalition Cabinet, where he persuaded the party to accept conscription, despite his own earlier misgivings. In 1916 he was elevated into Lloyd George’s five-man War Cabinet, where he secured a favourable deal for the party, including Labour controlled ministries, nationalisation of the coal mines and no industrial conscription.(23) MacDonald,



meanwhile, became chairman of the Union of Democratic Control, which included radical Liberals opposed to the war. It called for a negotiated peace and an end to secret diplomacy.(24)

It was a combination of the revolution in Russia and Henderson's removal from office in August 1917, after Lloyd George disapproved of his decision to attend the international socialist conference in Stockholm, which marks the emergence of Labour as an independent force. Pugh has described Lloyd George's action at this time as "a major blunder", as it led to "a rapprochement between middle class Socialists of the ILP and UDC and moderate trade unionists".(25) Wrigley too has claimed that after Henderson's resignation from the government, "Lloyd George never recovered the trust of the trade union centre of the Labour movement".(26)

More important for Labour, however, was the opportunity it gave Henderson to improve the organisation of the Labour Party ready for a post-war election. In particular he worked with Sidney Webb to secure a new Party Constitution. This was adopted at a party conference held in February 1918. Many of the changes reflected the increased influence of trade unions on the movement since the outbreak of the war.(27) There was also pressure on the Labour Party at this time from right wingers such as Havelock Wilson of the seamen, who were talking of forming a separate Trade Union Labour Party.(28) Meanwhile in response to the expansion of the electorate by the 1918 Representation of the People Act, Henderson secured the establishment of constituency parties with individual membership. Before 1918 membership of the Labour Party had only been possible through affiliated bodies, such as the trade unions or the Socialist Societies. Finally as part of the new Party Constitution, Clause 4 was adopted, calling for the nationalisation of the means of production. Historians have put forward a number of conflicting reasons for this. Whilst it might be seen by some as a move to the left, it seems that there was no intention to translate Clause 4 into a comprehensive programme. McKibbin, for instance, claims that Clause 4 was adopted in order to give the party a direction as well as a means to differentiate it from the Liberals.(29)

In June 1918 the party adopted Labour and the New Social Order, which gave them a distinctive programme, with which to fight the 1918 Election. It called for "the socialisation of industry in order to secure the elimination of every kind of inefficiency and waste".(30) It went on to propose the common ownership of land, the nationalisation of railways, canals, coal and electricity, a capital levy to pay off the National Debt and social reforms in housing, health and education. Thorpe describes it as in many



ways a “radical programme”, but also “a constructive programme, aiming to preserve the extended wartime state and the increased saliency of working-class demands that the war had brought”.(31)

In June 1918 the Party Conference agreed to abandon the election truce. Henderson’s work in improving Labour’s organisation meant that the number of affiliated constituency bodies had risen from 199 in 1916 to 400 in 1919.(32) Meanwhile the number of professional agents had increased from 17 in 1912 to 80 in 1918.(33) Henderson’s improvements in the organisation of the Labour Party enabled it to field 361 candidates for the election, of whom 140 were backed by local parties, 50 by the ILP and the rest by trade unions. This was a reflection in part on Labour’s improved financial position, as union affiliation grew.(34) This must be seen as a major factor behind the emergence of the party as the second political force in 1918.

Lloyd George’s decision to fight a ‘khaki’ election in December 1918 owed much to his fear of the threat of Socialism and the need to elect a new parliament before the impact of demobilisation was felt.(35) The government was able to exploit the national sense of Germanophobia, which prevailed at the time. The result was a triumph for the Coalition, which won a total of 523 seats, of whom 379 were Conservatives.(36) The Labour Party contested 361 seats, winning 57 of them and claiming 20.8 per cent of the vote. The Asquithian Liberals were isolated as the party, which had failed in government and then opposed Lloyd George. They secured only 13 per cent of the vote and 36 seats.

Some historians have stressed the disappointing nature of Labour’s result, especially given the strength of the trade union movement at this time. Turner, for instance, writes that the 1918 Election was “a deliberate and largely successful effort to hold back the advances of the Labour Party”.(37) He describes Labour’s performance as “unimpressive” and “worse than predicted”.(38) Thorpe too claims that the party’s performance in England was particularly “disappointing”, winning only 8 more seats than in December 1910. Even in mining areas Labour won only 24 of the 50 divisions, which had the highest proportion of miners. Also in the 12 largest provincial centres Labour won only 6 of the 87 available seats. “Only in the Midlands did Labour win seats in distinctly new areas”.(39)

Other historians have seen Labour’s performance in a more positive light. McKibbin, for instance, stresses that in this election the party secured its “independence”, since it had successfully broken its pact with the Liberals.(40) Indeed Lloyd George had spent much time attacking Labour as a class party, run by “the extreme pacifist Bolshevik group”.(41) Many Coalition candidates had compared Labour with the Bolsheviks in Russia.(42) In these circumstances Labour’s performance can be seen in a more



credible light, especially as they emerged from the election as the main opposition party to the Coalition. It should also be remembered that Lloyd George had a great propaganda advantage, having called the election just after the Armistice had been signed.

It is obvious that Labour had successfully removed many of the constraints that had held it back in the pre-war years. Historians, however, have been divided over where the emphasis should be put. Those such as Wilson (43) and Bentley (44), who claim that the Liberals were still a major electoral force down to 1914, have put the emphasis for their decline in 1918 on the impact of the war and especially the divisions it brought to their party. The wartime split in the Liberals led amongst other things to the abandonment of the party's reforming zeal. The Asquithians, who remained outside the Government, were not capable of standing as a party of the left, as they tended to be those least sympathetic to New Liberalism. Lloyd George, himself, could only continue with Conservative support, which curtailed any reform programme. The final disaster for the Liberals was to be his mishandling of the 'coupon' before the 1918 Election. Tanner has also pointed out that Liberal divisions affected the constituencies, especially in areas where organisation was weak, as in parts of the West Midlands. Here the party had been dominated by a small group of radical Progressives, who now defected to Labour, leaving no constituency organisation.(45)

Those historians of the party, who have linked the rise of the Labour Party with the emergence of militant trade unionism in the pre-war years, have seen Labour's achievements in the post-war years as the climax of this.(46) In particular they point to the party's success in the pre-war years in capturing the trade union vote from the Liberals at a time when union membership was increasing.(47) Wrigley, for instance, has put much emphasis on the Trade Union Act of 1913, which permitted trade unions to set up a political fund. Those unions whose members voted in favour of Labour representation "ensured Labour's post-First World War electoral finances, and in themselves reflect an element of the explanation for the rise of the Labour Party and the decline of the Liberal Party in the twentieth century".(48) Reynolds and Laybourn, in their study of the Labour Party in West Yorkshire, claim that even before 1914 the Liberal decline "had probably become irreversible" due to Labour's support from the trade unions.(49)

During the war trade union membership rose nationally from 4 million in 1914 to 6.5 million in 1918 with 5.3 million affiliated to the TUC.(50) This trend was encouraged by the role which unions played during the war. Many historians see this as the key factor behind Labour's rise in the post-war years.



McKibbin, for instance, stresses that of Labour's 57 victories all but 8 MPs were union nominees. He summed up Labour's success by claiming that "in this election, as in the three succeeding it, successful Labour candidates rode the unions to parliament".(51) Savage and Miles show that, as a consequence of Labour's dependence on the trade unions in 1918, most of their support came from small towns, especially in mining districts. In fact only 19 per cent of its MPs and 22 per cent of its total vote came from large cities, with only Manchester, where 4 seats were won, seen as "a Labour stronghold" in 1918.(52)

Tanner, however, has claimed that increased union membership did not necessarily mean greater involvement in Labour politics. He points to the unwillingness of unions to finance further parliamentary candidates in 1914-5 as well as the strength of opposition by union members to political affiliation in ballots held at this time.(53) Indeed even in those unions, which were closest to Labour, such as the miners and railwaymen, the political fund was not always being widely collected. For instance only one eighth of NUR members were paying the levy in 1917 and less than a half in 1918. For ASLEF it was only a quarter.(54) Nevertheless during the war more unions, including the Engineers, voted to support political representation.(55)

According to Tanner, three factors persuaded Labour to increase its number of parliamentary candidates in 1918. There was the split in the Liberals, which amongst other things restricted their standing as a party of reform. Boundary revisions and proposals for an Alternative Vote were thought to give Labour an advantage in the constituencies. Finally the revolution in Russia gave Labour confidence in what might be achieved.(56) Even so as late as April 1918 Labour had only 115 fixed candidates, according to NEC Minutes.(57)

Where Labour was successful in 1918 Tanner does recognise the importance of the link with the trade unions. He accepts that unions like the miners and railwayman, who benefited from state control of their industries, were influenced by Labour's policy on nationalisation.(58) Even so these unions financed less than half the 160 trade-union sponsored candidates in the 1918 General Election.(59) Tanner also sees Labour building on its success in Tory working-class constituencies where Liberalism was weak. He claims that these seats, which were mainly in the North West and the West Midlands, were won because of the party's association with the gains made by the predominant local union.(60)

Tanner is on less certain ground, however, when he suggests that Labour support in these seats came predominantly from the unskilled.(61) Unions representing the unskilled were the most patriotic in



their support for the war, which suggests that this element of the working class was more likely to be attracted by the appeal of Lloyd George. Indeed nationally the party appeared to stand for the skilled worker, who wanted the return of pre-war working conditions. This was the situation, which Savage found in Preston, where the local party was dominated by the engineering union. They were opposed to the continued use of female labour and stood for the restoration of pre-war working conditions.(62) It is true that Labour did less well in those Liberal working-class heartlands, where a Liberal organisation and economic message remained.(63) Tanner describes Labour here as having “put a foot in the door ...but it was not always unchallenged or unchallengeable”.(64)

Another constraint on the growth of the Labour Party, which has caused a certain amount of controversy, was the restricted size of the working-class electorate. This was removed by the Representation of the People Act of 1918, which trebled the number of voters from 7 to 21 million. In addition to all men over 21 with a six-month residential qualification having the vote, all women over 30, who were householders or wives of householders and enfranchised for municipal elections, were also given the vote. Matthew, McKibbin and Kay have pointed out that the pre-war franchise prevented the emergence of a truly working-class electorate, as about 4½ million men were disenfranchised. They see the 1918 Franchise Act as a major factor in Labour’s replacing the Liberal Party, claiming that the Act not only trebled the size of the electorate it also transformed its character.(65) Turner, in a detailed analysis of the 1918 Election, also points to a correlation between new male voters and Labour support although not as strongly as McKibbin suggested.(66)

Tanner, however, claims that the 1918 Reform Act tended to give the vote to the sons and wives of previously enfranchised male voters, which was unlikely to cause much “political disruption”. He estimates a small but not significant increase in the proportion of working-class voters in 1918 from 70 to 78 per cent of the population as a whole.(67) Tanner sees the boundary revisions of 1918 as more significant. They worked to Labour’s advantage, because they were based on ‘economic interest’. They tended to create homogeneous industrial seats to the benefit of Labour and rural agricultural constituencies to the benefit of the Tories.(68)

The impact of the female vote in 1918, which made up 40 per cent of the electorate, is generally reckoned to have benefited the Conservatives, as there were disproportionately more middle-class women enfranchised under the terms of the 1918 Act. Moreover it was suggested, even at the time, that women were more likely to support the Coalition, as they were stronger for vengeance against the



Germans out of loyalty to their menfolk.(69) Also, according to Savage and Miles, many women were likely to see the Labour Party as being dominated by male trade unionists, who were often hostile to female employment. Women in work were also much less likely to be members of a trade union.(70)

Historians have said that the Labour Party was better suited than the Liberals for mobilising the new extended franchise. According to Matthew, McKibbin and Kay the Liberals failed to take electoral organisation seriously and were “unwilling to make the necessary demagogic appeals to the mass electorate created by the 1918 Act”. They still believed the electorate would be attracted by “an appeal to issues, to good sense, to active citizenship, to intelligent political interest and to an articulate awareness of the content of legislation”.(71) The Labour Party, however, did not base its appeal on “democratic rationalism”. Policy was never allowed to stand in the way of exploiting “the diffuse but intense social conscience of its adherents”. Emphasis was put on “shrewdly contrived slogans” and “subtle calls upon class loyalty”.(72)

Although Lloyd George’s decision to call a ‘khaki’ election in 1918 brought him a great victory, it also opened a new era in politics, as the Labour Party became the main opposition. This factor, which was seen as a threat by many on the right, coloured politics during the inter-war period. The need to challenge or accommodate the Labour Party was to become a pressing issue in the years that followed.

## **B. REGIONAL DEVELOPMENTS**

### **1. THE LABOUR PARTY IN BIRMINGHAM**

Birmingham has been described by Boughton as “a bastion of working-class Toryism” and “a Mecca of Unionism” during the inter war years.(73) The tradition for this dates back to the era of Joseph Chamberlain, who, as Liberal Lord Mayor of Birmingham, was responsible for a range of social reforms. These were aimed at capturing the votes of the newly enfranchised working-class householders in the city. Having failed to impose his views nationally on the Gladstonian Liberal Party, Chamberlain fused his radical group with the Conservatives to form the Unionist Party. Although much of their reforming zeal had waned, the move had a major impact on Birmingham politics. In particular it left the Liberal Party a weak force in the city, so that even in 1906 at the height of the party’s success nationally, Birmingham returned only Unionist M.Ps. The Chamberlain tradition was continued by his successors in the city throughout the inter-war period with two of his sons, Austen and Neville, representing wards in the city and featuring prominently on the national stage.(74).



Unionism in Birmingham was assisted by the unique nature of the local economy. At the turn of the century the city of a thousand trades was the centre of small-scale industry, where trade unions were weak and there was little independent working-class organisation. Even amongst the poorest in the seven 'inner ring' wards the attraction of the Chamberlain tradition was strong. "The semi mystical power of the name itself" has been considered an important factor.<sup>(75)</sup> Within the slums Boughton describes "a fatalistic working-class mentality predicated on survival" with little time for "unproductive ideas of self improvement or social change". There was also "an ostensibly apolitical but strongly conservative culture" often centred around the public house but with a strong sense of "civic identity and patriotism". In these circumstances the Labour Party could be seen as outsiders threatening change.<sup>(76)</sup>

Yet there were signs that the economic structure of the city was beginning to change in the pre-war years, as new large-scale factories emerged with the development of the motor and electrical engineering industries. This process was accelerated during the First World War, when Birmingham became a major arsenal for the allies. The city's factories were expanded to cater for the manufacture of army vehicles, aircraft components, machine tools and shells. The Austin works, for instance, which employed 2,800 workers in 1914, increased its workforce to 20,000 by 1918, after the factory was converted to the manufacture of munitions.<sup>(77)</sup>

As far as the Labour Party was concerned Unionism exercised a major constraint on its development in the city. Yet in the immediate pre-war years and during the First World War itself there was a rise in trade union membership and industrial militancy. The Birmingham Trades Council, which had been formed as early as 1866, began to reflect this changing situation.<sup>(78)</sup> At first they had worked with the Liberals to secure the return of working men to School Boards and then the Town Council. In 1901 they affiliated to the LRC. and unsuccessfully stood two Labour candidates in the 1906 Election.<sup>(79)</sup>

In the boom years before the First World War industrial militancy mostly affected semi-skilled and unskilled workers, who were seeking a minimum wage. In 1913 the Birmingham Trades Council supported the Workers' Union in backing a demand for a general minimum wage of 23 shillings throughout the engineering and metal working industries. A bitter dispute then broke out initially across the Black Country but then in Birmingham itself, which was largely successful.<sup>(80)</sup>

During the war most of the industrial unrest was brought about by skilled engineers in the ASE, who resisted wartime changes to their status, especially over the 'dilution of labour' in munitions work. An



official agreement was reached in 1915 to last for the duration of the war, but as this did not apply to private work there was unrest here during 1917. There was rancour too with the Workers' Union, representing the semi skilled and unskilled, over the privileges which skilled men enjoyed, especially with regard to recruitment. There was a further disagreement over enrolling women workers into trade unions. The ASE, which was male only, handed over the recruitment of women in engineering to Mary Macarthur's National Union of Women Workers. Julia Varley, however, claimed that women would secure a better deal as members of the Workers' Union.(81) Skilled men were also affected by the so called 'leaving certificate', which prevented them from leaving employment at a munitions works to find work elsewhere without the written permission of their employer. A shop steward movement emerged to defend the workers, as the official union leadership was pledged to industrial peace. Unrest broke out during 1917-18 over these matters and also to secure pay rises to match price increases. By the summer of 1916 the cost of living had risen by 50 per cent on pre-war levels, whilst wage rates lagged behind on 20 per cent.(82)

Having removed the 'leaving certificate', skilled workers were faced with the 'embargo'. Every factory employing skilled men needed a license from the Ministry of Munitions. An embargo was then placed on employing skilled men in those factories without the license. This was seen as another blow to the mobility of skilled men. It led to 150,000 workers in the Birmingham area coming out on strike on the 25<sup>th</sup> July 1918. The dispute lasted two days until the government threatened to withdraw the men's protection from military service. This strike, which was bitterly attacked in the local press, reflected the level of dissatisfaction amongst skilled engineers at this time.(83)

Divisions in the workplace were reflected within the Birmingham Trades Council. In 1914 the Trades Council and the local LRC merged. At first criticism of the Government's war policy was limited to members of the ILP and the newly formed Union of Democratic Control. Joseph Southall, the chairman of the local branch of the ILP, spoke on anti-war platforms. The issue of conscription, however, was to prove to be a seriously divisive one within the Birmingham Labour movement as a whole. In the workplace the ASE, representing the skilled workers, backed their powers to claim exemption for their members from military service. The Workers' Union, on the other hand, took a leading role in recruitment with Jack Beard, its leading midlands official, active in the British Workers' League. This was an organisation set up to counter the growing appeal of the Labour Party, combat pacifist feelings and arouse patriotism amongst the working class. Financed by Milner, it combined



strong nationalism with socialist views on the state control of industry. It was also opposed to Free Trade and especially the future importation of German goods. Lloyd George supported the League, making its president, John Hodge, his Minister of Labour.(84) The chairman of the Birmingham branch of the League was Eldred Hallas, who was Joint Secretary of the Gas, Municipal and General Workers and a local Labour councillor.

Within the Birmingham Trades and Labour Council the chief opponent of conscription was Councillor Kneeshaw, whilst its main supporters were Councillor Kesterton, the secretary, who was backed by union leaders such as Beard of the Workers' Union, Hallas and W.J.Davis of the Brassworkers. Such was the strength of feeling on the matter that differences reached the local press.(85) The Trades and Labour Council, itself, having supported the voluntary system, voted 72-55 against conscription in 1916

A more serious rift occurred, when a number of Labour leaders took up the case for a negotiated peace. Jim Simmons, a discharged, wounded soldier, organised and spoke at meetings under the banner of Peace by Negotiations.(86) Eventually the Council passed a motion to seek a negotiated settlement by 43 votes to 29. As a result of this a group emerged, which sought a more energetic prosecution of the war, claiming that the Council misrepresented the views of trade unionists. 13 branches resigned, including the Electrical Trades Union, the Brassworkers and some Workers Union branches. They claimed that "the Council had been devoting too much time to political matters to the exclusion of trade unionism".(87)

In August 1918 they formed the Birmingham and District Trades Union Industrial Council, including members such as Eldred Hallas, W.J.Davies and Jack Beard. The group had links with the British Workers' League and hoped to form a separate Trade Union Labour Party.(88) They opposed Henderson's reorganisation of the Labour Party, fearing it would lead to an influx of middle-class pacifists. They also opposed his decision to leave the Coalition and break the election truce. Plans to set up an alternative Labour Party, however, broke down. Instead they decided to join the recently formed National Democratic Party, in order to oppose pacifist Labour candidates in the forthcoming election.(89)

By the end of the war, despite the apparent rise in trade unionism, the labour movement in Birmingham entered the 1918 General Election in a divided state. The Birmingham Trades and Labour Council was dominated by those who were opposed to conscription and had long favoured a negotiated

peace. Its secretary, Fred Rudland, had been elected as an anti-conscriptionist. When in July 1918 the Birmingham Central Labour Party was formed, it also reflected these views. The party selected only five candidates to fight the twelve wards in this Election. They included, Jack Kneeshaw of the ILP at Ladywood, who had led the anti-conscription group since 1915. Another left winger, who later became a member of the Communist Party, was Dr Dunstan, who fought Moseley. On the other hand Councillor Shann, who had repudiated the ILP's opposition to the war, fought Yardley. In addition to the Labour candidates, there were two, who represented the political wing of the Co-operative Movement, including Frank Spires, the chairman of the Trades and Labour Council, at Sparkbrook. There were also two Independent Labour candidates. Another candidate, Edmunsen, was disqualified from standing in West Birmingham, because he was too late in handing in the money for his deposit.(90)

On the other side there were labour representatives standing for the Coalition. In accordance with the tradition of keeping politics out of trade unions, Alderman Jephcott, a former president of the Trades Council, stood for Yardley as a Unionist candidate. Eldred Hallas stood for the National Democratic Party as a couponed Coalition candidate for the Duddeston seat. Labour had been prepared to oppose him, but a letter in the Minute Book of the Birmingham Borough Labour Party explains their decision to withdraw following a Liberal nomination. It appears that the reason for this was finance rather than any deal with the Liberals.(91)

In an electoral survey of Birmingham the Daily Mail described the mood of the city as one of "radicalism and desire for long delayed reform".(92) Yet it went on to explain that "such is the effect of a generation of use and habit, that.... the entire representation of the twelve divisions of this progressive community is about to be committed to Tory reactionaries or colourless, characterless, political compromises". Labour's association with pacifism did not bode well, since, the article pointed out, the "the city is intensely patriotic. The pacifists during the war.... are an inconsiderable and despised section".(93)

Although the Labour Party failed to win any seats their performance was not totally disastrous. Their best results were in the outer suburbs of the city, such as Yardley where Councillor G.Shann won 38 per cent of the vote and at Kings Norton, where the pacifist Co-op candidate, T.Hackett, won 30 per cent of the vote. Another cause for satisfaction for Labour was that they finished ahead of the Liberals in every seat, where the two parties clashed. Yet with so many of their candidates opposed to



conscription, it had been easy for the Unionists to portray Labour as the party of pacifism. The Labour Party also lacked the finances and organisation to match the Unionists. This was particularly important in this election given that so many new voters were on the electoral roll.

## 2. THE LABOUR PARTY IN THE BLACK COUNTRY

### A. ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL BACKGROUND TO 1918

Before 1914 the Black Country was considered to be an economically depressed region.<sup>(94)</sup> The coal and iron industries were in terminal decline, whilst many of the metal working trades, like chain and nail making, were suffering from outdated technology. Whilst Birmingham continued to expand as a manufacturing centre, the Black Country stagnated. Unemployment was high, whilst wages were low. There were exceptions to this, especially in the case of Wolverhampton, where a number of large factories were built in the early twentieth century, making electrical equipment, cycles and motor vehicles, along with their accessories.<sup>(95)</sup>

There were other significant differences between the two regions. Whilst Birmingham had transformed itself in the late nineteenth century into a city with distinctive public buildings, the Black Country apart from Wolverhampton, remained a region of industrial villages. There had also been none of the urban social reforms here associated with Chamberlain, which had linked the Birmingham working class to Unionism. Liberalism too remained a stronger force in some parts of the Black Country than in Birmingham. Much of this could have been due to the strength of Nonconformity in many parts of the region.

Yet before 1914 the Black Country, like Birmingham, had seemed a particularly unfruitful region for the Labour Party. One factor here was probably the much-stated factor of the weakness of trade unions in both regions. Only in Wolverhampton had Labour achieved any major success. Five councillors were elected here between 1898-1908, before a counterattack by the Conservatives removed all but two of them.<sup>(96)</sup> More spectacular, however, was the Labour success in the Wolverhampton West constituency in the 1906 General Election, although this owed much to the active support provided by the Liberal Party.<sup>(97)</sup> Elsewhere in 1906 Black Country voters rejected Joseph Chamberlain's Tariff Reform programme, despite the proximity of Birmingham. The Liberals won all but one seat in the region, due to the fear that the abandonment of Free Trade would increase the cost of living. Yet the

swing to the Liberals here was less than 4 per cent, as Tariff Reform had some appeal, especially in areas of depressed industries.(98)

As far as the Labour Party was concerned organisation, where it did exist, it was held back by disagreements between trade unionists and Socialists, such as the ILP. In particular the former looked for practical policies, which frequently meant working with the Liberals, whilst the latter was not willing to make such compromises, preferring to campaign alone. One area where this division was particularly evident was Wolverhampton, where the ILP wanted to field more candidates in local elections.(99)

Despite their successes in 1906 the Liberal organisation was struggling to survive in many Black Country constituencies.(100) It is this apparent Liberal weakness, which has led Tanner to include the region in with the rest of the West Midlands under the description of Tory working-class.(101) Yet in West Bromwich under the influence of its MP, Dr Hazel, the Liberals did develop a radical profile.(102) In Walsall, too, the Liberals worked with local trade unions, such as the miners and railwaymen, backing Lib/Lab candidates for municipal elections.(103) Moreover in the two constituencies of Wolverhampton East and North Worcestershire the party remained firmly entrenched with working-class support. Indeed these were to be the only two seats left to the Liberals after the 1910 Elections. Elsewhere the appeal of the Conservative's Tariff Reform policy was a significant factor. This was due mainly to the persistence of unemployment and low wages in the Black Country, whose industries were mainly dependent on the home market and prone to foreign competition.(104)

In the years between 1910 and the outbreak of the First World War the Labour Party began to make steady progress in the region. Labour Representation Committees were set up in Smethwick in 1909 and in West Bromwich and Wednesbury in 1912, whilst in Walsall a Labour Association was established in 1912 to secure political representation.(105) Labour's next successes came in local elections, especially those in Smethwick in 1912 and 1913, where nearly half the council's seats were captured.(106)

In most of the Black Country constituencies, however, the party remained poorly organised and financed. Tanner, in his survey of regional Labour Parties at this time, claims that, had there been an election in 1915, Labour would only have contested Wolverhampton West, where A.G.Walkden was selected in 1912.(107) There was also a prospective candidate in Wednesbury, but the local party



backed down from its commitment to fight the seat. Finance was a problem in West Bromwich, whilst in the Handsworth division, of which Smethwick was a part, no candidate had been appointed.(108)

One major feature of the region in the immediate pre-war years and during the war itself was the increase in trade union membership and industrial unrest. Traditionally the Black Country, with its small scale mines and factories along with the survival of sub-contracting, was seen as a region with limited labour militancy.(109) Tanner in his brief survey of the region stresses the impact of the rent strikes of 1912-4 and the municipal workers' strikes of 1913 on the growth of Labour support. Perhaps more significant, however, was the widespread unrest across the engineering and metal working industries during 1913 as semi-skilled workers sought a minimum wage of 23 shillings a week. At one time 30,000 workers were on strike and some stayed out for 3 months. Peace was only achieved when the employers conceded the minimum wage. The result was to be a big increase in union membership by the semi skilled, who, in the absence of support from the craft unions, had turned to the Workers' Union. At the same time the support given to the strikers by the Labour Party helped to cement ties between the two. As a result Labour seemed to benefit from the industrial militancy, as was shown by their successes in local elections in Smethwick.(110)

The trend towards increased trade union membership continued during the First World War, when parts of the Black Country, especially Smethwick and Wolverhampton, became centres of engineering for the munitions industry with a large increase in the workforce. Full employment coupled with the higher profile the government gave to organised labour caused union membership to rise rapidly. Barnsby puts the growth in ASE membership in the Black Country at two and a half times between December 1914 and December 1918.(111) In Wolverhampton overall trade union membership rose from 5,000 to 20,000. Dudley had 4,000 trade unionists with 3,000 affiliated to the trades council, which was reformed in 1916.(112) New trades councils were also set up in Rowley Regis, Oldbury and Brierley Hill to augment existing ones in the larger centres.(113) Nevertheless Barnsby's conclusion is that "trades council activity grew considerably during the war ... but neither trades council activity nor trade union membership seems to have expanded as fast as either the opportunities or the necessities of wartime demanded".(114)

There was similar friction in the Black Country as in Birmingham between skilled workers, like the Engineers and the general unions such as the Workers' Union. Rising prices and war profiteering were two further issues, on which unions acted. Wages, which were fixed by a Committee on Production,

tended at first to lag behind price increases. After 1916, however, lower skilled workers benefited from flat rate increases. This led to complaints from skilled men that their differentials were being eroded. When in October 1917 skilled men were able to secure a 12½ per cent bonus, following the removal of the 'leaving certificate' there was unofficial action amongst the lower paid piece workers. Eventually they were offered a 7½ per cent bonus, but in February 1918 there was an outbreak of strikes by piece workers demanding the full increase. It began with nut and bolt workers in Wednesbury, followed by the tube workers. Later Black Country workers were affected in July 1918 by the full-scale dispute over the 'embargo'.

The Black Country labour movement was to be similarly divided as Birmingham over the issue of conscription. On the one hand the Union of Democratic Control, which was set up to oppose it, had a branch in Wolverhampton.<sup>(115)</sup> On the other side the British Workers' League was active in the region, holding a meeting in Wolverhampton in May 1916, where John Beard took the chair and the local speaker was Reverend J.A. Shaw.<sup>(116)</sup> Another prominent member of the League was Victor Fisher, who was a former member of the British Socialist Party, but had resigned over its pacifist opinions. He then formed the Socialist National Defence Committee in 1915, which he soon merged with the League, becoming its president for a time.

Fisher spoke at a League meeting at Wolverhampton in January 1917. Another spokesman for the League was Charlie Sitch, who was an influential trades union official in the chain making industry. Indeed Shaw and Sitch were the League's main speakers in the region during 1917, addressing large meetings at Willenhall, Wolverhampton, Dudley and Brierley Hill.<sup>(117)</sup> Later Fisher negotiated with Steel-Maitland, the prominent Birmingham Unionist over the distribution of seats for National Democratic candidates in the 1918 General Election.<sup>(118)</sup> As a result Hallas stood at Duddeston in Birmingham, the Reverend J.A. Shaw contested Wolverhampton East, whilst Fisher, himself, stood in Stourbridge. All these candidates sought to appeal to the patriotic working class and were strongly backed by Lloyd George, who gave them the 'coupon'. Charlie Sitch, on the other hand, stood as the Labour candidate for Kingswinford.

By the time of the 1918 Coupon Election the Labour Party was ready to fight nine of the ten Black Country seats. The constraints that had held back the party before the war had been largely removed. In particular the wartime growth of trade unions and especially the numbers affiliated to trades councils, gave local Labour parties the funds to finance candidates. Moreover the war had brought forward



employment issues, which trade unionists felt would need political representation to promote their views.

## B. THE 1918 GENERAL ELECTION

### 1. SMETHWICK

Smethwick was one Black Country seat where Labour seemed to benefit from the boundary changes brought about in 1917. It was now a largely working-class constituency, created out of the old Handsworth seat. According to Pelling, the growth of Smethwick had made this constituency less safe for Unionism in the 1906 and 1910 General Elections.(119) Indeed Handsworth had the lowest percentage Unionist vote in the January 1910 Election amongst the seats within the Birmingham District classification.(120) Labour had also been successful in the Smethwick municipal elections held immediately before the First World War.(121)

Industry had boomed in Smethwick during the war years, so that by 1918 there was an estimated 9,000 trade union members represented on the local Trades Council.(122) This probably reflected the fact that, unlike other Black Country towns, Smethwick possessed a number of large employers of labour such as Tangyes, Avery, GKN and Chances glass works. The Labour candidate, John Davison, was a local man of moderate views, who was adopted as candidate in December 1917.(123) Davison had been the national organiser for the Society of Ironfounders for 6½ years as well as being on a number of government wartime committees. He had supported the war effort and spoken at recruiting meetings.(124) Nevertheless, the Birmingham Post claimed that he had “pacifist leanings”, which was said to have displeased some local trade unionists. They also described him as “an extremist of the type that in parliament has been a source of embarrassment rather than help to the government”. The reason for this appears to be his unwillingness to force severe reparations on Germany.(125)

There was to be confusion amongst the Coalition supporters, as to who was to represent them. Initially the candidate should have been ‘Major’ Thompson, a popular local figure, who was chairman of the Handsworth Divisional Association and president of the Smethwick Conservative club. The situation was changed, however, when Christabel Pankhurst emerged on the scene, announcing herself as the ‘Independent Patriotic’ candidate. Pankhurst was a former member of the Labour Party herself, but had left it during the war. She had been active in the region during October, when she addressed three meetings in Wednesbury on the theme of the ‘Dangers of Bolshevism’.(126) Fearing a split in the

anti-Labour vote, a letter was sent to Thompson from Lloyd George and Bonar Law, suggesting that he stand down.(127)

The removal of Thompson probably helped Labour as he was a popular local personality, who had been pledged support from the Smethwick Liberals.(128) Pankhurst was backed by patriotic Labour leaders such as Jack Kesterton, who was a local Labour councillor and union leader. He had, however, resigned as secretary of the Birmingham Trades Council after it had voted to oppose conscription. In a letter of support for Pankhurst he wrote that “We want the best brains of all parties, both sexes and we must have a Coalition Government. Now that the Labour Party has given itself over to the pacifist faction, it has no claims on working men”.(129)

Kesterton’s views were swiftly disowned by the Smethwick Trades Council, which quickly met and secured his resignation from the party.(130) The constituency was now “flooded” with Pankhurst’s “lady workers and literature” with the aim of capturing women’s votes and those of the patriotic working class.(131) She promised women workers “equal pay for equal work”, along with social reforms.(132) Her main message, however, appeared to be that Labour was a Bolshevik and pro-German Party.(133)

Away from Smethwick it was felt that Pankhurst would win the seat with a large majority to become one of the first women MPs.(134) Locally, however, it was thought that the treatment of Thompson would tell against the Coalition. Davison did not fit the image painted by Pankhurst, as he had worked hard to promote the war effort.(135) Furthermore he sought to secure the female vote by circulating a leaflet, which argued that the Labour Party was the women’s party.(136) Davison also made a big appeal to his working-class constituency by raising the issue of the restoration of pre-war working customs, which he claimed Lloyd George had promised to restore, but “was not prepared to carry it out in entirety”. He also claimed credit for negotiating a 47-hour week for the engineering and metal industries.(137)

The result was a narrow majority for Labour. The local press blamed “outside interference” by Pankhurst and her supporters for Davison’s victory.(138) Pugh has recently highlighted Davison’s victory as an example of a Labour candidate, who appealed to working-class Conservatives by successfully combining patriotism with support for government intervention in the form of the nationalisation of key industries.(139) There is much to be said for this, especially as Davison had played an important role in supporting the government’s war effort, which shielded him from



Pankhurst's vitriolic attacks. Yet the key factor in Labour's victory in Smethwick was the candidate's trade union links, which enabled him to seem aware of the potential post-war industrial problems in a town where trade unionism had grown rapidly.

## 2. WEST BROMWICH

In West Bromwich the local Trades Council decided to consult affiliated trade unions over a Labour candidate in November 1917, although not everyone supported this decision.<sup>(140)</sup> In February 1918, however, it was unanimously agreed to fight the seat, especially as Labour had already decided to contest Wednesbury, Smethwick and Stourbridge.<sup>(141)</sup> It was claimed that the town had 7-8,000 trade unionists, of whom 3,000 were members of the Workers' Union.<sup>(142)</sup> The ILP in West Bromwich was also a powerful force. Under Harry Brockhouse it had led opposition to the war, describing the decision of the Labour leaders to join the Government as "silly vanity".<sup>(143)</sup>

The first candidate to be selected was Joe Bailey, a native of West Bromwich, and secretary of the local ILP. He was acting secretary of the Trades Council and had also represented local workers on the National Council of the Ironfounders.<sup>(144)</sup> In his acceptance speech Bailey announced that "he would stand first as a Socialist and afterwards a trade unionist".<sup>(145)</sup> In September, however, Bailey resigned, supposedly for health reasons. It appears, however, that the local party was divided between those who were Socialist, following the ILP line on the war, especially over conscription, and those, like the Workers' Union representatives, who were more openly patriotic. It appears that Bailey was too closely linked with the former faction and unable to retain the confidence of the whole party.<sup>(146)</sup>

The man selected to replace him was Frank Roberts, an outsider from Northampton, where he was secretary of the Trades and Labour Council. He was a member of Labour's Advisory Committee and nominated by the Typographical Association.<sup>(147)</sup> Roberts was not a total stranger to the constituency, having been responsible in 1913 for finding food and lodgings for Black Country strikers, marching through Northampton on the way to London.<sup>(148)</sup> He was also a member of the ILP, but made it clear that he had "early dissociated himself from it on the question of the war" and from their peace keeping views.<sup>(149)</sup> In announcing his selection the local press commented that "Mr Roberts does not agree with that party (the ILP) in its attitude towards the war and he holds that Britain was justified in entering the conflict".<sup>(150)</sup> It is clear that Roberts was chosen as a moderate, who was best suited to heal local Labour divisions on this issue.

The Conservative candidate was Lord Lewisham, who had been MP since 1910 and was a member of the local Dartmouth family at Sandwell Hall. Much of the party's campaign was to be based around his war record and the need to punish Germany. Lewisham, however, had contracted malaria and was to be absent for much for much of the election.(151)

The Liberals had a prospective candidate for the seat, Dr Hazel, who was a former MP and had been active in the constituency for some time. On the 29<sup>th</sup> November, however, Hazel announced his decision to stand down in a letter to the local press. He pleaded ill health but also stressed his desire not to split the progressive vote.(152) Later, however, he spoke on the same platform as Roberts.(153) Not all Liberals, however, backed the Labour candidate. Eighteen prominent local members wrote an open letter to the press in support of Lewisham.(154) Although Hazel's decision to stand down happened on the same day as the Birmingham Labour Party withdrew their candidate at Duddeston there is no evidence of any deal between the two parties.(155) It is possible that Hazel's decision to withdraw was influenced by the apparent success of Roberts's campaign. This seems evident from the results of local elections. At the end of October in two newly created wards, Labour won only one of the six possible seats.(156) On the 23<sup>rd</sup> November, however, two seats were won in by-elections, suggesting a swing to Labour during the election campaign.(157)

Roberts put much emphasis on "fair and square dealing for everybody". He stood by the Labour programme but put emphasis on justice for those demobilised from the forces and from munitions work. Generous pensions should be given to all dependants, whilst the old age pension itself should be doubled and the age of receipt lowered to sixty. He also called for "free education from the elementary school to the university". Roberts called for an adequate living wage, shorter hours, annual holidays and the restoration of trade union conditions.(158) As an experienced trade union official he showed himself to be in tune with the needs of his electorate.

Roberts won the seat with a majority of 1,708.(159) This was later described as "one of the most extraordinary victories for Labour, which the last general election produced". He had been candidate for six weeks in a seat, which had never before been contested by Labour and where the local organisation was considered to be "not of the strongest character".(160) One obvious factor behind Roberts success was the strength of the union movement in the constituency, which, as was noted by the Birmingham Mail, was "expected to be pretty solid" in its support for the Labour candidate.(161) Roberts also made a big play for the women's vote, pledging to extend the Rent Act at a meeting



attended by 700 to 800 women.(162) The local Conservative press laid much emphasis on the illness of their candidate and weakness in their own organisation.(163) Perhaps the major factor behind his success, however, was the withdrawal of Hazel and the Liberal candidate's backing of Labour. Roberts, himself acknowledged this, stating that "the Radicals threw themselves on to the side of Labour and declined to split the democratic vote". It is also apparent that the West Bromwich Labour Party healed its differences and fought a united campaign, as Roberts, himself, confirmed:- "A feature of the election has been the understanding between the advanced wing of the Socialist movement and the moderate members of the Labour Party".(164)

### 3. WEDNESBURY

Labour's success in Wednesbury was possibly more predictable than in West Bromwich. The seat was essentially working-class in character, with the Liberals being a much less effective force. The constituency consisted of Wednesbury itself, which was a centre for tube manufacturing, Darlaston where nuts and bolts were made, and Tipton which was a decaying coal and iron centre. There had been moves to appoint a Labour candidate here as far back as 1903, but these had come to nothing.(165) . Later the constituency had been very much involved in the Black Country strike of 1913. The seat was then on a list for possible contention for a 1915 election, but no candidate was appointed.(166) Eventually Alfred Short was adopted as Labour candidate at the end of November 1918.(167)

Short was an official of the Boilermakers Society, secretary of the Sheffield Trades and Labour Council and a member of Sheffield City Council. He was also a member of the Labour Resettlement Committee, appointed by the Ministry of Labour to deal with demobilisation.(168) In his election address Short stressed the need to restore pre-war trade union rights and workshop customs. He also proposed "that war must be abolished as a factor necessary to human progress". In addition Short stressed the Labour demands for increased pensions, better education and public ownership of railways, canals and coal mines.(169)

The local press had no hesitation in supporting the Conservative Coalition candidate, Maconochie, claiming that Short "was not the kind of man they wanted to represent Labour in Wednesbury".(170) Maconochie, himself, accused Short of "trying to stir up blood between employers and workpeople", describing Short as "a full blown Socialist, whose wild ideas would bring the country to absolute

ruin”.(171) Similar views were also voiced in the local press, where much prominence was given to a local Conservative, Marshall Freeman, who accused Short of links with the ILP. In particular his talk of paying for the cost of the war by raising taxation, without mentioning taxing the Germans, was held against him.(172) Even references to a zeppelin raid on Tipton were brought up in the context of the issue of reparations.(173)

What alarmed local Conservatives was Short’s radical attacks on the Coalition, warning in a speech at Tipton that the return of the Coalition would mean the continuation of “the economic and social system which had brought to the workers of the country the depressing social conditions, the foul putrid houses called homes, low subsistence wages and the monopoly of land for the landlords”. Short went on to answer his critics by making it clear that he supported “full and complete reparations for the wrongs Germany had done”.(174) In Wednesbury, itself, he warned of a Commons “packed with autocrats, plutocrats and the great political reactionaries .... of the last 25 years”. They must “elect as their representatives men pledged to do their utmost to destroy the monopolies of land ownership”. After this enthusiastic meeting it was reported that Short was carried shoulder high “not by pacifists, nor by pro-Germans but by discharged soldiers”.(175)

The local press in Wednesbury had not expected Labour to win the seat, so Short’s victory came as a shock, typified by the comment “thank heaven Wednesbury is not England”. The reasons were seen as the promises put forward in Labour’s programme, along with “local prejudices”, which “clouded the great issues”. Labour was accused of exploiting “the emotions aroused in the aftermath of the many petty strikes, which have taken place in the Black Country of recent years”.(176) The disorganised state of the local Liberal Party, whose candidate secured less than 5 per cent of the total vote, also greatly helped Labour.

#### 4. KINGSWINFORD

Roberts and Short were both newcomers to their respective constituencies, but this was not the case with Charlie Sitch in Kingswinford. Before the war this constituency had been a South Staffordshire county seat, but with reorganisation it had become an essentially industrial one. It included the mining areas of Rowley Regis and Old Hill, Brierley Hill with the Round Oak steel works and the chain-making district of Cradley Heath. Within this region Sitch was an influential trade union official, who had been educated at a local council school before his union paid for his education at Ruskin College.



He was organiser of both the domestic outworkers in the chain making industry and Assistant Secretary of the factory based Chainmakers and Strikers' Association. In an industry notorious for its exploitation, Sitch played a major part in setting up the Chain Trade Board in 1909, establishing a minimum wage and raising piece rates.(177) He became Midland secretary of the National Federation of Women Workers. He was also a local councillor on Rowley Regis District Council, switching from Liberal to Labour in 1916.(178)

During 1917 Sitch had been an active supporter of the British Workers' League, speaking at meetings on their behalf.(179) Nevertheless he was adopted as Labour candidate ahead of the Old Hill Miners' Agent, Samuel Edwards, in June 1918.(180) At the time of his appointment, "no Labour organisation existed in the division, in fact no serious effort was made to set up any political machinery until somewhere about August". His campaign was a purely local effort with no outside speakers and "all his expenses.... defrayed by local trade unionists".(181)

Sitch was anxious to distance himself from the policies of MacDonald, Snowden and the ILP, even to the extent of describing the latter as "distinct and separate from the national party".(182) This was because he did not wish to be identified with their war-time pacifism. His campaign was greatly assisted by the disagreement between the Liberal and Conservative candidates, as to who was the true Coalitionist.(183) Sitch's victory with a majority of 2,888 was a reflection of his popularity as a local trade unionist. It also shows how Labour's success in 1918 depended very little on ward organisation and almost everything on the trade unions. Sitch was helped by the fact that most of the workers he represented were women, which enabled him to benefit from their recent enfranchisement.(184)

## 5. STOURBRIDGE

The old Liberal constituency of North Worcestershire was now renamed Stourbridge. It consisted of Stourbridge itself, along with Oldbury with its engineering and chemical industries and Halesowen with its iron and steel works, but not the main chain-making region, which was in Kingswinford. Parts of the constituency were described grimly by Margaret Bondfield as "black, pitiless mud, black grimy houses - little children smeared with black if they touch walls. Mothers struggling ever against the dirt fiend, with no proper water supply laid on and no proper sanitation, no decent bedroom accommodation".(185)

Labour had another strong trade union candidate to fight for the constituency in Mary MacArthur, who was the wife of an ILP Labour MP from Sheffield. MacArthur was the general secretary of the National Federation of Women Workers, which she had founded in 1906. In 1907 she had launched Woman Worker, a 1d newspaper, which had at its peak a weekly circulation of 20,000 copies.(186) She had a proud record as a union leader, working with Charlie Sitch and Julia Varley in organising a strike for a minimum wage amongst the Cradley Heath chainmakers in 1910. She then played a prominent part in securing better pay and working conditions for women in other industries such as hollowware and brick making.(187) During the war she was a member of the War Emergency Workers' National Committee, helping women in the labour market. She refused various offers of government posts, which upset Lloyd George, who regarded her as "a thorn in his flesh".(188) She now claimed to be the first woman candidate for Parliament. Her election expenses were defrayed by a 6d contribution from women and girl factory workers.(189)

The standing MP was a Liberal, Wilson, who was a chemical manufacturer from the Oldbury firm of Albright and Wilson.(190). Wilson claimed to have supported the Coalition's war policy, whilst reserving his independence on domestic matters. Nevertheless he was not awarded the Coalition 'coupon', which was the subject of some local resentment (191) The press described him as a 'temperance man', who stood for the State control of the drink trade.(192)

MacArthur put her views forward in an article in the Birmingham Gazette, entitled 'Why I am a Labour Candidate'. In it she emphasised the need for justice in foreign policy and for reforms in health and education at home. She also called for a free press and an end to conscription.(193) At the same time she issued 14 Points, in which she attacked war profiteers. She predicted a revolt when returning soldiers saw how these profiteers had exploited the women and children left at home.(194)

The Coalition candidate, Victor Fisher, a former Socialist, was now standing for the National Democratic Party. He described himself as having spent four years "fighting the defeatists and pacifists at home".(195) He sought to include MacArthur in this category, claiming that she was "bought by German gold and had German blood in her vein"(196) She was vulnerable to these attacks because of associations through her husband with the ILP. Nevertheless MacArthur sought to isolate herself from these views, winning the backing of the miners, hollowware workers and the chain-makers.(197) She was also backed by George Bernard Shaw.(198)



Fisher hoped to secure Conservative backing with an unashamedly patriotic campaign. In fact he was reported to be having “an uphill battle” and needed to produce letters and official tickets to show that he was the Coalition candidate.(199) Local Conservatives were not happy with the arrangements, having hoped for a candidate of their own. Indeed at one of his first meetings only six people turned up.(200) Fisher was forced to call in Conservative canvassers from as far away as Kidderminster.(201) He did, however, receive the backing of the Discharged and Demobilised Soldiers, following a meeting in Oldbury.(202)

It was Wilson, however, who held on to the seat with a majority of 1,333 in a tight three-cornered contest. He was greatly helped by the absence of a Conservative candidate. It seems likely that Wilson held on to the chapel vote, whilst Fisher captured that of the patriotic working class. MacArthur’s strength was amongst trade unionists, especially the women. Unfortunately for her the absence from this constituency of the Cradley Heath chainmakers cost her important votes. A further handicap emerged, when the returning officer insisted that she fought with her married name, Mary Anderson, on the ballot paper. It was thought that this would not be recognised by many potential voters.(203) MacArthur’s comment after her defeat, however, was typical of her character, saying that she “would rather be on the right side than the winning side”.(204)

## 6. WOLVERHAMPTON WEST

This was a Black Country seat, which Labour probably felt gave them their best prospects of success in 1918, as the party had held it from 1906 to 1910. It was not a typical Black Country division, however, as it was urban rather than industrial. Indeed Pelling, in his account of pre-1914 elections, describes the constituency as being in part “rather middle class” due to an extension of “villadom”.(205) Nevertheless under the terms of the 1918 Representation of the People Act the seat, which included most of the borough of Wolverhampton, was now essentially working class. The constituency has been singled out by Tanner as an example of one where the Labour Party experienced “a slow, steady increase in the number of affiliated societies”.(206)

The Labour candidate, Alexander Walkden, had been adopted as far back as 1912. Walkden, who was the general secretary of the Railway Clerks’ Association, played a major role in overhauling the local party organisation. An agent, James Whittaker, was appointed, offices rented and a monthly journal, the Wolverhampton Worker, established. Most of the money for this came from outside the



constituency, as his union's political fund provided £700 a year. Indeed it has been established that in 1913 only one tenth of the money spent on his candidature was raised locally.(207)

The local party was quick to respond to the political reforms of the war years. In April 1918, for instance, delegates were urged, under Henderson's reforms, "to secure individual members" and to ensure that all trade unionists joined this section.(208) Individual membership was reported to stand at 518 men and 189 women in July, rising to 587 and 206 in August, which was easily the best in the Black Country.(209) The local party also set up a Women's Section in May 1918, which elected a president and secretary, as well as agreeing to hold monthly meetings.(210) Later the party resolved to form a Maternity and Child Welfare Committee.(211) In this respect the situation in Wolverhampton differed considerably from that, described by Savage, in Preston, where the trade unions resisted such moves. Indeed the Wolverhampton party changed the membership of its Executive Committee, although it was still dominated by trade unionists, who had 8 of the 13 members.(212)

They also successfully linked up with the local Co-operative Society, which agreed to donate £10 a year and were permitted to elect delegates to the party.(213) Meetings were also arranged with the Free Church Council.(214) Finally attempts were made to shake up the wards by arranging regular meetings and appointing Captains of Polling Areas.(215) These proved to be far from successful as reports of poor attendances indicated.(216) A move to set up a local party in the East Division in time for the election fell through. The candidature of Shaw as well as relations with the British Workers' League seem to have been the major stumbling block.(217)

The Liberals had withdrawn their candidate from the seat in 1913, preferring to concentrate on the East division. In return for this move Conservatives sought not to oppose Liberals in municipal elections. The author of this move was the sitting Conservative MP, Sir Alfred Bird, who had held the seat since 1910.(218) The leader of the Wolverhampton Liberals, Alderman Bantock, was the other partner in the agreement. Yet it appears that the Liberals were divided as Walkden received the backing of the West Wolverhampton Liberal Association, whilst Bantock proclaimed his support for Bird.(219)

The Conservatives had improved their organisation in the pre-war years thanks to the money and efforts of Bird.(220) He was a local businessman, who exemplified a type of Conservative politician, who prevailed in the Black Country in the post-war years. An opponent of trade unionism and the labour movement, yet he stood in a constituency, which was still predominantly working class. Bird adopted a populist approach, claiming to represent every interest in Wolverhampton, including



labour.(221) He called for social reforms in health and housing, along with provision for the disabled and demobilised, widows and orphans.(222) The Labour Party manifesto was denounced as “making for bloodshed and revolution”, whilst he vowed equality of opportunity for every boy and girl. He pledged the removal of the old party labels in place of a new one, “the patriotic party”(223) Coupled with this, Bird exploited the feeling for revenge on Germany, putting forward his 14 proposals, which included the expulsion of German aliens and heavy reparations for ships, the wounded, widows and orphans.(224)

A major embarrassment for Bird was the fact that both he and Hickman, the Bilston MP, had voted to delay extending the franchise to women in 1917. Perhaps as a consequence of this it seems that Walkden was more successful in attracting the newly-enfranchised female voters to his meetings.(225) Meanwhile Bird’s son, Robert, supported his father with attacks on MacDonald and Snowden’s pacifism and a warning that “high wages needed to be protected from German imports when the war was over”. The Labour Party, he claimed, would allow Germany “to commence importing their manufactures into this country in the same way as before the war”.(226)

Walkden, meanwhile, fought a cautious campaign, stressing the Labour programme of a million new houses, along with nationalisation and higher taxes on large incomes. He described the Lloyd George Coalition as “a compact with the most reactionary forces in Britain”, but supported the Prime Minister’s social reforms and backing of the League of Nations. This was a sensible move given his need for Liberal support. At the same time, however, he was anxious not to appear too lenient towards Germany. Although warning against “a revengeful spirit”, he did call for “a thorough stocktaking of Germany”.(227)

The result, however, was a defeat for Walkden by the comparatively large margin of over 3,000 votes. The reason for Bird’s success has been seen to rest on his following the government line and emphasising the need for national unity. He even sent a copy of a letter from Lloyd George and Bonar Law, backing his candidature, to each household in the division.(228) At the same time the populist nature of Bird’s campaign was very significant. It is likely that Walkden was too scrupulous as a candidate. His cause was probably not helped by George Bernard Shaw’s backing, since he spoke in favour of Germany’s immediate acceptance into the League of Nations, as “one of the four most cultured nations in the world”.(229)

Labour lost here despite the local party having more members and better organisation than in any of the other Black Country seats. Probably the most significant factor behind this defeat was the nature of the constituency itself. The Labour Party succeeded in those Black Country seats, where trade unionism was strong within close knit working-class communities. Wolverhampton West, however, was an urban as well as an industrial seat, which meant that there were attractions beyond the local community. It also contained more of those voters who were less likely to support Labour, such as the middle class and the non-unionised members of the working class. In this respect it resembled Birmingham and other big cities, where Labour was generally less successful in 1918. It seems that these areas were more prone to the Coalition Government's propaganda campaign with its appeal for national unity.

## 7. BILSTON

The neighbouring Wolverhampton seat of Bilston had been held for the Conservatives since 1910 by General Hickman. This was the former Wolverhampton South seat, which lay entirely outside the town itself, but contained the large steel works at Bilston, the metal working towns of Sedgley and Coseley, along with the mining community of Gornal. During the war the British Workers' League had been active in this constituency with some success, as Reverend Shaw received a better reception here in 1916 than in Wolverhampton.(230)

Hickman was very much a local candidate, as his family had built up the local steelworks. They also dominated the Bilston Conservative Association. Hickman freely exploited anti-German feeling, calling for the Kaiser to be punished and Germany to pay extensive reparations.(231) With regard to German aliens he claimed that it should be "impossible for these dirty beasts to come home". He also insisted that the election was between the Coupon and the ILP and that MacDonald and Snowden had "sought to obstruct, oppose and defeat measures in the interest of the country"(232) Hickman, however, was forced to defend his own pre-war position on conscription as well his ties with Edward Carson and the Ulster Volunteers, for whom he had supplied weapons.(233) The Liberals withdrew their candidate early in the campaign, hoping for reciprocal action from the Conservatives in Wolverhampton East in support of Thorne.(234) Hickman did secure some Liberal support, but many of the rank and file appeared to back Labour.(235)

The Labour candidate in Bilston was Lieutenant Colonel Kynaston, who had seen service in West and South Africa. It was pointed out, however, that his election address did not mention how he



thought Germany should be punished.(236) Then on the eve of the poll his campaign was to be completely undermined by Hickman's exposure of his private life. A letter was produced from a Lieutenant Powell, claiming that Kynaston had seduced his wife and was now living with her, whilst his daughter was being systematically ill treated. Kynaston had, according to solicitors, bigamously married Mrs Powell in November 1914 and had one son.(237)

The late exposure of the matter hardly gave Kynaston a chance to put his side of the case. It would almost certainly explain the large Conservative majority. Hickman was reckoned to be popular with female voters and this would have boosted that support even more.(238) Kynaston had other drawbacks. Not only did he have no local ties, unlike Hickman, but he also lacked roots in the trade union movement, unlike successful Black Country Labour candidates.

## 8. DUDLEY

The Labour Party had been slow to develop in Dudley. Before the war the borough had two prominent working-class councillors, but neither was a member of the Labour Party. One was John Taylor, the secretary of the Midland Counties Trades Federation, who stood as a Liberal.(239) The other was William Bradford, the secretary of the Dudley branch of the Flint Glassmakers' Association, who stood as a Conservative. Bradford was also active in the Trade Union Tariff Reform Association, which had been strong in the Dudley area and gave the town some tradition for working class Conservatism.(240). There was as yet no Labour councillor.

The Trades Council, founded in 1897, was reformed in 1916. In July 1918 W.B.Steer, a former President of the National Union of Teachers, was selected as the Labour candidate.(241) There is some evidence to suggest that the choice of Steer was not unanimous.(242) It is probable that the patriotic trade unions were not pleased with the choice of a middle-class candidate, who had voiced his opposition to conscription and the threat of it continuing under the Coalition Government. However, Steer also spoke of Dudley's social problems, especially "the abominable housing conditions".(243)

The Conservative candidate and standing MP Arthur Boscawen, a former army colonel, was the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Pensions. He played strongly on anti-German prejudice, claiming that the Labour Party was "captured by a gang of Pacifists and Socialists, most of them were not real Labour men". This, he said, was resented by "many loyal and patriotic trade unionists". If Labour won, he warned, they would grant "a pro-German peace". (244) He declared that "Germany

must be made to pay for the war, even if there had to be an army of occupation for fifty years. We must wring every penny out of the Germans". He also went on to claim that Labour wanted "the capitalists of this country to pay for the war" rather than the Germans.(245)

The Labour Party attacked Boscawen's policies by claiming that "every vote for him was a vote for conscription".(246) They also attacked him for having supported a 25 shilling a week minimum wage for agricultural workers rather than the proposed 30 shilling wage.(247) Boscawen, however, was to announce a big increase in war pensions during the campaign. This, it was claimed by the press, "should secure him the bulk of the votes of soldiers and those who have suffered bereavement and disablement".(248) Boscawen was also a strong protectionist, which, it was thought, gave him a further advantage locally.(249)

The Liberal candidate Mervyn Howell withdrew early in the campaign.(250) It was hoped that his Free Trade supporters would back Labour, following the well-publicised lead of Liberal councillor T.Roberts.(251) Boscawen, however, won with a record majority. The local press, in explaining this, gave credit to "wise and discerning members of the Liberal Party", who "cast off those false guides, who would have installed their bolshevism into democracy".(252)

## 9. WALSALL

The Labour Party was also slow to develop in Walsall, where small-scale manufacturing prevailed and Liberalism remained a powerful force. At the turn of the century Lib-Labism was common, especially amongst the miners. The Liberal Party actively sought working-class support through their working men's clubs, as well as setting up branches of the Young Liberals and the Women's Liberal Association.(253) Their parliamentary candidate, William Brown, appointed in 1913, warned of the dangers for the Liberals of losing working-class support.(254) Although a retired businessman he claimed that little separated him from Labour members and even spoke of the need to defend trade union rights.(255)

The Walsall Trades Council, which tried to be non-political, was reformed in 1890 after a lapse of time. In 1892 there was a notorious bomb-making incident, which led to the imprisonment of Joe Deakin, a railway clerk, who later became a leading light in the Labour movement.(256) The Walsall branch of the L.R.C. was formed in 1903, combining with the Trades Council in 1906. Following this



the local ILP and Fabian Society affiliated, leading in 1912 to the formation of the Walsall Labour Association, which sought to secure Labour representation in local and national elections.(257)

Labour's first council seat was won in August 1913, at the time of the Black Country strike, in which the tube workers of Wednesbury and Walsall were particularly active. James Thickett, a railway signalman, was returned in a by-election, followed in 1914 by another railwayman, Henry Hucker. It was Thickett, the president of the Trades Council, who was selected to fight the seat for Labour in November 1918. This was reckoned to have brought a measure of unity to a movement that was already notably disunited. The reason for this was the number of separate societies and organisations, which had affiliated to the Labour Association in the town.(258)

The Coalition candidate was Richard Cooper, who had been elected in 1910 as a Conservative Unionist. Dissatisfied with his own party, however, he spoke out independently on issues concerning the working class, such as the Insurance Act, the minimum wage and the decline in real wages. Cooper had already been attracted to the idea of forming a National Party before the war, based on the Empire, Tariff Reform and Defence. Although he welcomed Coalition Government, he had opposed Lloyd George. He also opposed the Conservatives over their abandonment of Tariff Reform. In 1917 Cooper along with five other MPs set up the National Party.(259) He did, however, keep his own Conservative Association in support, so that in the 1918 Election he stood as Independent Coalition, but refused the Coupon.(260) Cooper was a tough candidate for Labour to oppose, as his populist policies included a minimum wage, an eight hour day and a housing programme.(261) He even supported equal pay for women for equal work, which would appeal to female voters.(262) In particular though he took a strong stand over the punishment of Germany, claiming, despite not having the 'coupon', to be "for Lloyd George and the Coalition".(263)

Brown, the Liberal candidate, claimed that Labour was splitting the Progressive vote. He pointed out that during the 1913 tube strike in Walsall he had stood beside Thickett.(264) Cooper, however, accused him of not being concerned about punishing Germany, enemy aliens or the question of dumping. Brown was portrayed as a "henchman" of Asquith, who had "failed utterly himself and tried to down Lloyd George".(265) Indeed many Liberals went over to Cooper with one even signing his nomination papers.(266)

It was soon apparent that Thickett was Cooper's main opponent.(267) He stood for the full Labour programme, although he was careful to stress a League of Nations rather than a Peace of Reconciliation

when mentioning the treatment of Germany.(268) This probably reflected the divided nature of the local Labour movement over the war and conscription. Thickett, himself, had supported the war and had spoken in favour of voluntary recruitment. He was forced to deny rumours that he would let Germany off lightly.(269) Walsall, however, had a branch of the British Workers' League, which backed Cooper and accused the local Labour movement of pacifism.(270) Their leader, George Power, was the secretary of the Midlands Leather Trades Federation, which was the most significant trade union in the town.(271) Indeed the Birmingham Mail reckoned there were more trade unionists in Walsall backing Cooper than Thickett.(272)

Thickett opened his campaign by describing himself as "an ordinary common working man" and claiming that it was time to replace "bankers, brewers, landowners and financiers by democrats, who are prepared to fight against all comers for the all important cause of Labour"(273) He attacked Cooper for supporting the 25 shillings rather than the 30 shillings minimum wage for agricultural workers.(274) In his Manifesto he stressed 14 Points, which he claimed were those of the National Labour Party, but were those that he saw as relevant to his campaign. Thus he stressed "the Complete Fulfilment of the Nation's Pledge to the Trade Unionists, that they should be unconditionally reinstated in respect of the Trade Union conditions and workshop customs, abrogated in the public interest". He also called for a compulsory minimum wage and a shorter working day. Unlike Labour's Call to the People there was no call for "equal rights for both sexes" nor for "equal pay" in industry. Indeed, unlike Cooper, no special appeal was made to female voters.(275)

In the last days of the campaign conscription played a major part, as both Liberals and Labour accused Cooper of backing it. Indeed Thickett's supporters waved large 'No Conscription' banners. Cooper was forced to urge that "if you want your man home for Christmas vote for me".(276) Cooper also attacked Thickett as MacDonald's man, who would let the Germans off lightly, although this was not strictly true, given Thickett's support for the war.(277)

Cooper retained his seat with a majority of over 6,000, which was the largest in the region. Thickett came second, which was a reasonable result for Labour. Indeed Cooper's populist appeal to the working class had some echoes of inter-war Fascism. The Liberals were the real losers, as much of their philosophy was thrown in doubt by the war. Even Free Trade was under attack as the leather trade had called for the prohibition of German imports.



## 10. WOLVERHAMPTON EAST

The only Black Country division not to select a Labour candidate for the 1918 Election was Wolverhampton East, which might have seemed the most promising for Labour. In his account of parliamentary elections before 1914, Pelling describes it as “a more uniformly working-class constituency than was customary in the straggling Black Country environment.”(278) Yet Wolverhampton East was a Liberal stronghold, having returned a member of that party in every election since the constituency was formed in 1832.(279) It now continued to do this in every election in the inter-war years. The seat contained only three of the twelve Wolverhampton wards, plus Wednesfield and Willenhall. Leopold Amery, who contested the seat for the Conservatives in pre-war elections, described it as “a stronghold of Nonconformity” consisting of “a piece of Wolverhampton...itself and a series of industrial villages...I had never before realised anything quite so dreary or squalid....”(280) The Prime Minister, however, considered Wolverhampton sufficiently significant as to open his campaign there with a radical speech on the 23<sup>rd</sup> November, in which he stressed that the effort that had won victory must be kept going “until we put England right. There are many things that are wrong and which ought not to be – poverty, wretchedness and squalor”.(281)

The Liberal MP, George Thorne, was a local solicitor, who had represented the seat since 1908. According to Jones the force behind the local Liberals before the war had been small shopkeepers, as industrialists had earlier gone over to the Conservatives.(282) Another base of Liberal strength here lay in the Party's support for Nonconformity, which they had confirmed during the education battles at the beginning of the century.(283) Equally significant in 1918 was the fact that Thorne was able to secure the backing of influential trade unions, such as the Locksmiths and the Midland Counties Trades Federation.(284) Even the Workers' Union offered support.(285) It seems, according to the Birmingham Gazette, that for this election “practically all the local Labour bodies are now either officially or unofficially backing Alderman Thorne”.(286) It also appears that a pact still existed in the town between Labour and the Liberals not to oppose each other in parliamentary elections. Thus in return for backing Thorne, the Liberals were expected to back Labour in the West division.(287) The Liberals also secured the support of the Irish in this constituency, who described Thorne as “one of Ireland's most faithful and longest friends”.(288)

. Thorne, who was considered to be something of a radical MP, when he was first elected, was not awarded the ‘coupon’. Instead it went to Shaw, standing for the National Democratic Party, who

received it, along with a telegram of support from the PM.(289) The Labour Party in Wolverhampton had negligible organisation in the East division, preferring to concentrate its efforts in the West, where it was thought that the Conservatives were more vulnerable. The Conservatives were also notoriously badly organised in the East, deciding to withdraw their own prospective candidate and back Thorne.(290) In return Thorne did back the Coalition Government's domestic policy, but on the question of an indemnity on Germany, he urged that we "must distinguish between justice and vindictiveness".(291)

Shaw, who had left the Labour Party the previous August, stressed his own trade union connections and his role in supporting the rights of housing tenants during the pre-war rent strikes.(292) He also spoke out in favour of a "living wage" and "protection against dumping".(293) In his Manifesto, however, Shaw distanced himself from the Labour Party by stressing his connections with Lloyd George and the Coalition. He did state, however, that he had been "a life-long champion of the cause of the worker, I have never turned Labour down". He also emphasised the social programme of the Coalition, especially the promised reforms in health, housing and education, as well as more rights for women. In this respect Shaw was supporting a radical political programme.(294) In effect, however, he was seeking to win the vote of the patriotic working class, whilst emphasising his wartime role in combating pacifism and strikes. He did receive the backing of the district branch of the Gas, Municipal and General Workers' Society, but his claim to stand for Labour was repudiated by the Willenhall Labour Party.(295)

The result showed the working-class electorate evenly divided, with Thorne winning by only 522 votes. Shaw's defeat has been put down to his lack of organisation, coupled with Thorne's strong personal following and his support for Lloyd George.(296) Yet this was to be Thorne's narrowest majority in the inter war years, It suggests that Labour could have made greater headway in this constituency in later elections with a strong local candidate and good organisation.

### C. CONCLUSIONS

The 1918 General Election was particularly significant in the Black Country since it set the pattern for the inter-war years. Overall Labour won four of the region's ten seats, whilst two were held by Asquithian Liberals, three by 'couponed' Conservatives and one by a maverick Conservative, who stood as a member of the National Party. Labour's share of the vote in the nine seats they contested was



42.8 per cent, which was an even more impressive statistic. Moreover this was a proportion that did not vary greatly during the period. It also compares favourably with the 24.8 per cent, which Labour achieved in Birmingham, where Coalition candidates swept the board.(297)

Labour's success in this Election was particularly creditable, given the pre-war strength of the Conservatives in the Black Country, when they had held all but two of the seats. Conditions still seemed favourable to them, since as part of the Coalition led by Lloyd George, they could appeal to the patriotic working class, as the party, which had won the war. Writing of the Conservative performance nationally, Ramsden has claimed that the party "reaped the benefit of its national identity in the election of 1918, capturing the mood of the moment as surely as Lloyd George did. In the strident campaign of December 1918 the Unionists were in their element, sure of what must be done as no other party was sure".(298) Yet this had not been the picture in the Black Country.

Tanner sees Labour's victories here as conforming to his theory that it was either mining or Tory working-class seats, which swung their way in 1918. Kingswinford, for instance, is put into the former category, whilst the three other Labour successes are seen as Tory working-class seats, where Liberalism was weak (299) Yet this is somewhat misleading as, although mining was carried out in Kingswinford, it was not the major industry. In fact the Labour victor here, Charlie Sitch, was a leading trade union official in the chain making industry. Certainly the Liberals did badly, gaining fewer than 1,000 votes in Wednesbury, whilst in Smethwick and West Bromwich they did not stand. Yet in West Bromwich the Liberals had worked hard to revive their party in the pre-war years, so that Labour's success here was very dependent on the withdrawal of the Liberal candidate and his endorsement of Labour.

In another industrial region, West Yorkshire, Labour's performance in 1918 has been described as "disappointing".(300) This was reckoned to have been because there was still a strong Liberal presence, which split the anti-Conservative vote. Tanner reckons that in such traditional Liberal areas both Parties had similar social roots, whilst the Liberal economic appeal was still attractive.(301)

In the Black Country, however, except in the seats of Wolverhampton East and Stourbridge, the seeming disarray of the Liberals helped the Labour Party. Indeed the former contested only four other seats, coming last in each of them. Yet the Liberal Party was far from dead in the Black Country. In the three constituencies of Wolverhampton East, Walsall and Stourbridge it remained a force amongst working-class electors throughout the inter-war years. A significant factor behind this was the



employment situation in these constituencies. Small-scale industry prevailed with a tradition of good industrial relations in close knit communities. The influence of the chapel was also important. The Liberal vote here was a working-class vote. In Wolverhampton East, for instance, it was the skilled locksmiths of Willenhall, whose union backed Thorne. In Walsall it was the miners who had a Liberal tradition going back to the Lib-Lab days, which had not yet been transferred to Labour. In Stourbridge Wilson's support was strongest in Oldbury, where he was an employer at a chemical works and where the chapel was still a significant influence. Class-based politics had developed less here.

Elsewhere Tanner's explanation for Labour's success is Tory working-class voters turning to Labour. He points to the backing the party secured from unions like the Ironfounders, who supported the war and sought to protect the gains, which their members had made from it.(302) No reference is made, however, to the industrial unrest, which affected the region both before and during the war. Turner, on the other hand, sees Labour's performance in Wednesbury and West Bromwich as "a survival of the anti-government spirit of the engineering strikes"(303) Tanner, however, makes an important point, when he states that the Labour Party was better organised in West Wolverhampton, West Bromwich and Smethwick than in Birmingham. Furthermore he claims politically the party was more moderate in these towns and supported by a stronger trade union movement.(304)

It certainly seems that the major factor to benefit Labour was the rise of trade unionism in the region and its close links with the Party. All four of Labour's successful candidates were trade union leaders. Charlie Sitch, for instance, had played a big part in organising the chainmakers in his constituency. John Davison of the Ironfounders and Alfred Short of the Boilermakers both represented unions, which were important locally. Frank Roberts in West Bromwich represented a union from outside the region, but he was a strong personality, who was very aware of working-class aspirations. The opposite side can be shown with the failure of Labour at Bilston, which was a seat with many similarities, but with a candidate who lacked union roots.

The differences with Birmingham were twofold. In the first place, despite the strength of engineering in the city, trade unionism was not so significant as in the Black Country.(305) Consequently the Labour Party was more dependent financially on a few individuals than on union affiliation fees.(306) Furthermore in the Black Country both the trade unions and the local constituency parties had tended to support the war, which put them more in tune with the electorate of 1918. In Birmingham, on the other hand, there had been a strong anti-conscription movement, followed by the passing of the motion in the



Trades Council early in 1918 to seek a war settlement. This made the Labour Party more vulnerable to Coalition accusations of pacifism during the election.

Another significant factor behind Labour's success in the Black Country in 1918 was the extension of the franchise. It has been estimated that fewer than 60 per cent of the adult male population in borough seats was enfranchised before 1918. By the autumn of 1921 English adult male enfranchisement was 94.9 per cent.(307) In Walsall, for instance the electorate increased in 1918 from 15,949 to 42,933, of whom 16,854 were women.(308) Given the socio-economic status of the new male voters, it seems likely that a disproportionate number would be attracted to the Labour Party. Even the newly enfranchised female voters in the Black Country were likely to be more attracted to the Labour Party than in other regions, given the high proportion of female manual workers in industries such as chain making, hollow ware, brick making as well as metal working.

An important consequence of the weakness of the Liberal Party in much of the region was that the local Liberal press gave Labour candidates a fair hearing. Thus in West Bromwich the Midland Chronicle was sympathetic to Roberts, whilst the Smethwick Telephone stayed strictly neutral in that constituency.(309) The Birmingham Gazette also preferred Labour candidates to their traditional enemies the Unionists, where there was no standing Liberal. Roberts, himself, paid tribute to "the splendid service the Birmingham Gazette had rendered" and expressed his appreciation for what "the paper had made in the cause of Democracy and Labour".(310) On the other hand the Wolverhampton Express and Star backed Thorne in the East but Bird in the West and Hickman in Bilston.(311)

Labour Party organisation seems to have been less important for this General Election. Thus the seat where Labour was best prepared was Wolverhampton West, which the party failed to win. Instead they won Kingswinford, where party organisation appears to have been negligible. The key factor, however, appears to be trade union organisation, since membership appears to have been higher in those seats that Labour won.

Personality played an important part in all constituencies. Where Labour was successful they had trade union candidates, who were aware of working-class needs. The Coalition also had local populist candidates such as Cooper, Bird and Hickman, who adopted a strident anti-Labour stance, appealing to working class patriotism. Much of this was indeed following the lead of Lloyd George himself, who saw it as the best way of keeping Labour at bay. Indeed it was Cooper, the most strident of these candidates, who secured the region's biggest majority in Walsall.

The fact that the Coalition appeal was still powerful in the Black Country suggests that class politics had not swept through the region. On the other hand since Labour did secure a significant breakthrough, it does suggest that the war years had brought an increase in working-class confidence. The war also brought divisions within the working class, especially those between skilled and unskilled, which probably prevented the emergence of greater working-class awareness and Labour success.

## FOOTNOTES

- 1 See Introduction footnotes 49 and 50.
- 2 Thorpe, A. (1997), p.47. Taylor puts the figure of 447 Labour candidates, of whom 363 endorsed by the Labour NEC, 10 were Co-operative candidates, 36 Coalition Labour and the rest were independent, mostly left wingers. Taylor, A.J.P. English History 1914-1945 (1965), P.127.
- 3 For a general account of the wartime unrest in the engineering industry see Wrigley, C. David Lloyd George and the British Labour Movement (1976), p.184-204.
- 4 Marwick, A. The Deluge: British Society and the First World War (1965), pp.203-210.
- 5 Tanner, D. (1990), p.369.
- 6 Cole, G.D.H. (1948), p.53-4.
- 7 Cronin quotes Tom Jones in February 1919:- "Much of the present difficulty springs from the meeting of the rank and file against the old established leaders and there seems to be no machinery for bringing about a quick change of leaders". Cronin, J.E. Labour and Society in Britain, 1918-79 (1984), pp.20-1.
- 8 Winter, J.M. Socialism and the Challenge of War (1974), pp.184-223. Royden Harrison in 'The War Emergency Workers' National Committee 1914-1920' in A. Briggs and J. Saville (Eds.) Essays in Labour History 1886-1923 (1971), pp.211-59 explains the membership of the Committee. Three came from the Parliamentary Committee of the TUC. three from the Management Committee of the General Federation of Trade Unions, three from the NEC and six others were elected. Walsall was to be one town, where a local committee modelled on the national one was set up.
- 9 Winter, J.M. (1974), p.220.
- 10 Turner, J. (1992), p.108.



- 11 McKibbin, R. (1974), p.88.
- 12 Ibid., p.89.
- 13 Ibid., p.100.
- 14 Ibid., p.105.
- 15 Tanner, D. (1990), p.351
- 16 Tanner claims that “war did not transform the position of skilled workers”. In industries like shipbuilding and printing there were local agreements to increase work without allowing in ‘diluted’ labour. Women were largely employed on repetitive munitions work, where 60% of men and 54% of women were ‘dilutees’. On Clydeside and in mining and transport there was little ‘dilution’. In order to increase production, however, there was a general shift to piecework, which many unions were suspicious of. Ibid., pp.352-7.
- 17 Although hourly wage rates only kept up with the inflation rate workers benefited from more regular work. Ibid., p.357. Piecework would also have boosted wages.
- 18 The average days lost in strikes annually 1915-18 was 4.2 million, whilst the figure for 1910-14 was 17.9 million and that for 1919-21 was 49.1 million. Taylor, A.J.P. (1965), p.40. Tanner claims that “many union leaders and members were emphatically patriotic, to the point, in some instances, of xenophobia”. Members of the ILP, who were pacifist were particularly unpopular and often ceased to hold public meetings. Tanner, D. (1990), pp.361-2.
- 19 Tanner points, for instance, to clashes between the ASE and the Workers’ Union in engineering as well as ASLEF and the NUR on the railways. Ibid., pp.363-4.
- 20 Tanner argues that “the idea of patriotic sacrifice in the interest of victory was a powerful counterpressure acting against the development of war-time opposition to the government”. Ibid., pp.365-70.
- 21 The number of days lost through strike action rose from 2.95 million in 1915 and 2.45 million in 1915 to 5.65 million in 1917 and 5.88 million in 1918. Pelling, H. (1963), p.262.
- 22 Thorpe gives credit for Labour unity to the formation of the War Emergency Workers National Committee, which was set up to protect working-class living standards at the outbreak of the war. Thorpe, A, (1997), p.33.
- 23 Henderson was able to secure this deal because Lloyd George needed the Labour Party, owing to the fact that the bulk of the Liberal Party continued to back Asquith. Ibid., p.34.

- 24 According to Thorpe the UDC and similar bodies were to be “a crucial conduit of middle-class radicals into the Labour Party”. Examples included E.D.Morel and C.P.Trevelyan. *Ibid.*, p.43.
- 25 Pugh, Martin, (1982), p.179.
- 26 Wrigley, C. *Arthur Henderson* (1990), p.120. Wrigley sees Henderson as the key figure at this time due to his Cabinet experiences, whilst MacDonald was in eclipse. *Ibid.*, p.121.
- 27 Amongst changes were those to the structure of the NEC with the Socialist Societies losing their special representatives on it. Instead there were to be 11 from the trade unions (soon moved up to 13), 5 from the constituencies and 4 from the Women’s Section.
- 28 Havelock Wilson of the Seamen’s Union can be classified as an ultra loyalist, in that he was prepared to abandon workers’ rights to secure complete military victory. W.J.Davies of the Brassworkers and John Beard of the Workers’ Union followed a similar line in the West Midlands
- 29 McKibbin downplays the importance of Clause 4, claiming that it was less important than other provisions at the time. He sees it as a ‘bait’ to the middle-class socialists, who had lost out elsewhere in the reorganisation of the party. McKibbin R. (1974), p.97. Thorpe in his history of the Labour Party adds three other reasons. One was the influence of the Webbs in the drawing up of the Constitution. A second was as a means of competing with the far left. Finally it was seen as a means of demarcating the party from the Liberals. Thorpe A. (1997), p.44.
- 30 To many union leaders the socialisation of industry meant the continuation in some form the wartime collectivism with the State “organising, controlling and auditing the processes, profits and prices of capitalist industry”. McKibbin R. (1974), p.104.
- 31 Thorpe, A (1997), p.45. It has also been referred to as an example of the Party’s “reformist and class conciliatory policies”, with its call for every member of the community to secure “all the requisites of healthy life and worthy citizenship”, whilst assuring its readers that “this is in no way a class proposal”. Benson, J. (1989), p.189.
- 32 McKibbin, R, (1974), p.106.
- 33 *Ibid.*, p.89.
- 34 The number of trade unionists affiliated to the Labour Party rose from 1.57 million in 1913 to 2.96 million in 1918. Cole, G.D.H. (1948), p.481.
- 35 A number of historians have stressed the threat of ‘socialism’ as a factor behind the timing of the 1918 Election. Turner, for instance, quotes a letter sent by Lloyd George to the King:- ‘It is



important that the Election should take place now, rather than at a later period when demobilisation may be in progress and thousands of both the military and civil population thrown out of employment, thereby causing considerable unrest in the country'. Turner, J. (1992), p.317.

- 36 The Coalition's total was made up from:- 332 couponed Conservatives, 127 couponed Liberals, 4 couponed Labour, 1 Independent, 9 from the National Democratic Party plus 47 uncouponed Conservatives and 3 Ulster Unionists. This was 53.2 per cent of the total vote. See Cook, C. The Age of Alignment: Electoral Politics in Britain 1922-1929 (1975), p.4.
- 37 Turner, J. (1992), p.434.
- 38 Ibid., pp.318 and 404.
- 39 Labour won 6 seats in Scotland and 9 in Wales. Thorpe, A. (1997), p.47.
- 40 McKibbin, R. (1974), p.111.
- 41 Birmingham Post editorial 14<sup>th</sup> December 1918, in which Lloyd George's speeches were freely quoted.
- 42 The candidate, who made the biggest effort to suggest a link, was Christabel Pankhurst in Smethwick. See Birmingham Post, 11<sup>th</sup> December 1918.
- 43 Wilson, T. The Downfall of the Liberal Party (1966). Wilson also points to the impact that the war had on religious Nonconformity, which had done much to underpin the Liberal Party. The Free Churches, which believed in peace between nations, lost much of their political force as they became split over the war. Ibid., pp25-8.
- 44 Bentley, M. (1987).
- 45 Tanner, D. (1990), pp380-1.
- 46 For Labour's success in capturing the support of trade unions from the Liberals see Pelling, H. The Origins of the Labour Party (1954).
- 47 Trade union membership rose from 2.5 million members in 1909 with 1.6 million affiliated to the TUC, to 4.1 million members with 2.7 million affiliated in 1914. Pelling, H. (1963), p.262.
- 48 Wrigley, C. 'Labour and the Trade Unions' in Brown, K.D. The First Labour Party 1906-1914 (1985), p.151.
- 49 Reynolds, J. and Laybourn, K. (1987), p.1.
- 50 Pelling, H. (1963), p.262.
- 51 McKibbin, R. (1974), p.111.

- 52 Savage, M and Miles, A. (1994), pp.85-6.
- 53 According to Tanner in ballots held under the Trade Union Act of 1913 an average of 40 per cent voted against their union having a political fund in a turnout that was usually less than 50 per cent. Tanner, D. (1990), pp.321-3.
- 54 Ibid., p.401.
- 55 The ASE now immediately selected 14 additional candidates. Ibid., pp.393-4.
- 56 Henderson felt that the Alternative Vote, which was proposed but then rejected in the 1918 Representation of the People Act, would have persuaded more local parties to put up candidates. Ibid., pp.395-6.
- 57 NEC Minutes, 24 April 1918. Tanner, D. (1990), p.396
- 58 Labour's support for state control suited union interests amongst the miners and railwaymen, because it brought uniform wages, consolidated minimum wages and limited working week. Ibid., p.372.
- 59 Out of the 160 candidates sponsored by the unions, the miners financed 51, the ASE 16 and the railway unions 15. Ibid., p.403.
- 60 Ibid., pp.413-4,
- 61 "(Labour's) commitment to protecting the gains made by the unskilled workers who often dominated Tory areas also gained some credibility from the experience of war collectivism". Ibid., p.426.
- 62 Savage, M. (1987), pp.166-7. Savage claims that the engineers felt so strong on this issue that they successfully delayed the setting up of a Women's Section.
- 63 "The Liberals had a stronger, more secure, position which in some areas (even in 1918) they attempted to maintain. The areas of heavy industry, the Yorkshire and Lancashire textile belts, many urban and rural areas of the South, and some parts of London, had a more Liberal political culture." Tanner, D. (1990), p.414.
- 64 Ibid., P416.
- 65 The authors also claim that the Liberals were reluctant to take electoral organisation seriously, in order to appeal to the mass electorate. Organisation was devolved to their Federations, leaving "no formal party structure or membership". Matthew, H.C.G., McKibbin, R. and Kay, J.A. (1976), pp.742-9.



- 66 Turner, J. (1992), p.418
- 67 Tanner, D. (1990), pp.387-8. If the plural vote were excluded the figure would be 80 per cent.
- 68 *Ibid.*, pp.387-8.
- 69 In addition to women making up 40 per cent of the electorate many were also proxies for sons and husbands. Pugh, M (1982), p.196.
- 70 Savage, M. and Miles, A. (1994), p.82.
- 71 Matthew, H.C.G., McKibbin, R. and Kay, J.A. (1976), pp.742-3.
- 72 *Ibid.*, p.747.
- 73 Boughton, J. (1998), pp.16-20.
- 74 Austen Chamberlain was MP for Birmingham West until his death in 1937, whilst Neville was MP for Ladywood until 1929, when he transferred to the safer Edgbaston seat.
- 75 Rolfe, K.W.D. (1974), p.83. Rolfe rightly rejects any suggestion that people voted Chamberlainite "because the family represented, however tenuously, a residual Nonconformity". *Ibid.*, p.76.
- 76 Boughton, J. (1998).
- 77 Hastings, R.P. (1979-80), p.85.
- 78 For the history of Birmingham Trades Council see Corbett, J. Birmingham Trades Council 1866-1966, (1966).
- 79 In the 1906 General Election James Holmes fought East Birmingham, taking 47.4 per cent of the vote and losing by only 585 votes. Bruce Glasier, editor of Labour Leader, fought Bordesley, taking 33.9 per cent of the vote. See Roberts, S. 'Politics and the Birmingham Working Class: the General Elections of 1900 and 1906 in East Birmingham' in West Midland Studies, 15 (1982), Roberts, S. 'Independent Labour Politics in Birmingham 1886-1914' in West Midland Studies, 16 (1983) and Wareing, R. 'Birmingham Politics 1891-1914' M.A. Thesis, University of Wolverhampton (1983).
- 80 For accounts of the Black Country Strike see Hyman, R. The Workers' Union (1971) and Taylor, E. (1974).
- 81 Barnsby, G. Socialism in Birmingham and the Black Country (1998), pp.297-8.
- 82 Hyman, R. (1971), p.88.
- 83 For further information on wartime strikes in Birmingham, see Corbett, J. (1966) and Hyman, R. (1971).

- 84 Douglas, R. 'The National Democratic Party and The British Workers' League' in The Historical Journal XV 3 (1972), pp.534-536. The British Workers' League also sought to maintain "the social-imperialist tradition in British politics", which accounts for its links with Lord Milner. It has been by some authors as a pre-fascist movement. Linehan, T. British Fascism 1918-39 Parties, Ideology and Culture (2000), p.44.
- 85 Beard was attacked in the Birmingham Post by John Simpson, who claimed amongst other things that Beard could support conscription because he was too old to be called up himself. Corbett, J. (1966), p.112.
- 86 Simmons was to be one of many Labour leaders to be imprisoned during the war. Barnsby, G. (1998), p.260.
- 87 Birmingham Gazette, 12 August 1918.
- 88 Ibid., 12 and 26 August 1918. Also Corbett, J. (1966), pp.112-5.
- 89 Douglas R. (1972), pp.538-9.
- 90 Birmingham Gazette, 5 December 1918.
- 91 The letter was sent by John Thompson of the National Transport Workers' Federation:-  
"Owing to the unfortunate position that has developed in the Duddeston Division of Birmingham in connection with the Liberal Party, I think you will agree that owing to the circumstances I am doing right in advising our Mr Boyd to withdraw his nomination. You will understand that I succeeded in getting Mr Boyd to allow him to go forward in principal so that Councillor Hallas would not be returned unopposed and there is now an undoubted risk of £150 being lost. I am of the opinion that the cash would be put to better use at the next General Election, which I think and hope will not be long". Birmingham Borough Labour Party Minute Book, 28 November 1918.
- 92 The Daily Mail had a more balanced coverage of the 1918 Election than for later ones. Indeed the NEC sent a letter to Lord Northcliffe in appreciation of "the generally fair and accurate service that had been rendered to the Party". NEC Minutes, 2 January 1919.
- 93 Daily Mail, 4 December 1918.
- 94 For industrial development in the region see Allen, G.C. (1929).
- 95 Jones, G. (1969), pp.20-21.
- 96 Ibid., pp.44-45.
- 97 Taylor, E. (1974).



- 98 The only seat that was held by the Conservatives was Kingswinford, which was a more rural seat before the boundary changes of 1917. Pelling, H. (1967), p.187.
- 99 In 1908, for instance, the ILP proposed fielding 10 municipal candidates in Wolverhampton, but was rejected by the Trades Council. Tanner, D. (1990), p.184.
- 100 Two examples of constituencies with Liberal MPs but a struggling Liberal organisation were Wednesbury and Handsworth, which included Smethwick. *Ibid.*, pp.181-2.
- 101 Tanner also includes the North West, areas of London and the South Coast ports in this category. *Ibid.*, p.162.
- 102 Hazel was able to transform the Liberal Party in West Bromwich because there was “no entrenched, institutionalised, conservative elite”. *Ibid.*, p.182.
- 103 For Liberal efforts to attract working-class support in Walsall before 1914 see Dean, K.J. (1971), pp.12-3.
- 104 Pelling, H. (1967), p.187.
- 105 Tanner, D. (1990), pp.186-7. Ward, J ‘The Emergence of the Labour Party in the Black Country 1910-1922’ University of Wolverhampton M.A. Thesis (1993), pp.34-6. A Walsall Trades Council had been re-established in 1890, but it tried to be non-political. A branch of the LRC was then set up in 1903, with the two combining in 1906. The Labour Association was formed specifically to secure political representation. Dean, K.J. (1971), pp.20-1.
- 106 In 1912 Labour contested 4 of the 6 seats in Smethwick, winning 3 and in 1913 they contested all 6, winning 3. Labour also won its first municipal seat in Walsall, where the President of the Trades Council, Joseph Thickett was returned in a by-election in 1914. For further details on the position of the Labour Party in the Black Country in the pre war years, see Ward, J. (1993), pp.33-39.
- 107 Tanner, D. (1990), p.189.
- 108 *Ibid.*, pp.194-195.
- 109 See Allen, G.C. (1928), pp.170-171 and Hopkins, E. A Social History of the English Working Classes (1979), p.199. Benson, J. (1990), pp.100-11 not only agrees with this, but also argues that it merely reflected a similar scene across Britain as a whole.
- 110 This was certainly the view of the Birmingham Gazette, after the 1913 municipal election results. “The effect of the recent labour unrest, with its fresh awakening of Trade Union workers to the

consciousness of strength in collective action is seen on many hands". Birmingham Gazette 3 November 1913.

111 Barnsby, G. (1998), pp.275-6.

112 Ibid., p.280.

113 Ibid., p.281. Trades Councils already existed in Wednesbury, Wolverhampton, Walsall, West Bromwich, Smethwick, Willenhall, Stourbridge and Bilston.

114 Ibid., p.281.

115 Ibid., p.306.

116 Ibid., p.310. Before the war Shaw had been active in Wolverhampton as a Labour activist, leading the Tenants Defence League during the Rent Strike. Ibid., p.186.

117 Ibid., p.311.

118 Rolfe, K.W.D. (1974), p.189.

119 Pelling, H. (1967), p.183. At this time Handsworth was not a part of Birmingham.

120 Ibid., p.180. The Unionist vote here was 60.6 per cent in January 1910, compared with 72.3 per cent for Bordesley and 68.1 per cent for Birmingham East. The seat was not contested in the December 1910 Election.

121 See Ward, J. (1993), pp.55-58 for a full account of the campaign.

122 Birmingham Post, 10 December 1918.

123 Smethwick Telephone, 8 December 1917.

124 He was, for instance, a member of the National Trade Union Advisory Committee. Ibid., 30 November 1918.

125 He was said to be prepared "to let Germany down lightly, for he suggests a drastic revision of the system of taxation to pay for the cost of the war". Birmingham Post, 10 December 1918.

126 Midland Advertiser and Wednesbury Herald, 19 October 1918. Pankhurst spoke at Tipton, Wednesbury and Darlaston on the 16, 17 and 18 October 1918.

127 Birmingham Post, 4 December 1918.

Dear Major Thompson,

We have learned with regret that owing to a division of the Coalition vote, there is now a danger of the seat being lost if both you and Mrs Pankhurst go to the poll. We know that to suggest that you should retire is asking a very great sacrifice, not only for yourself, but for your friends who



support you in the constituency. At the same time, if you could see your way to retire you could be doing, in our opinion a real public service for which we should be grateful.

Yours sincerely

D. Lloyd George. A. Bonar Law

- 128 It was thought unlikely that they would pledge their support to Christabel Pankhurst. Birmingham Mail, 7 December 1918.
- 129 Daily Mail, 13 December 1918. Kesterton had been active with the group of Birmingham Labour leaders, who had sought to set up an alternative Trade Union Labour Party in August 1918.
- 130 Smethwick Telephone, 21 December 1918.
- 131 Birmingham Mail, 7 December 1918.
- 132 Daily Mail, 3 December 1918.
- 133 Birmingham Post, 11 December 1918. She claimed that “had it not been for her profound sense of public duty to come forward in this fight against Bolshevism and pro German pacifism, she would not have faced the painful necessity of asking and accepting such a sacrifice from one of Smethwick’s leading and much beloved citizen”. Ibid., 9 December 1918.
- 134 Smethwick Telephone, 30 November 1918.
- 135 Birmingham Gazette, 5 December 1918. Davison assured the public:- “I am no Bolshevik. I am a sane practical trade union leader”. Smethwick Telephone, 14 December 1918.
- 136 The Times, 14 December 1918.
- 137 Smethwick Telephone, 4 January 1919.
- 138 Ibid., 30 November 1918.
- 139 Pugh claims that “the winning formula used by Davison in 1918 carried strong overtones of Labour’s appeal in 1945 in so far as it combined patriotism with interventionism”. Pugh. M. (2002), p.530.
- 140 W. Cooke, secretary of the Trades Council, resigned over the decision, whilst Joe Bailey warned that Labour should concentrate first on local elections. Midland Chronicle, 2 November 1917.
- 141 On the 2 February 1918 representatives of 18 trade unions, the ILP and the Co-operative Society met at the Labour Church and unanimously agreed that the borough should be contested. Ibid., 8 February 1918.
- 142 This was the claim of J. Sutton of the Workers’ Union. Ibid., 8 February 1918.

- 143 Barnsby, G. (1998), pp.305-6. Brockhouse was elected president of the Annual Midland Conference of the ILP in January 1915. He expressed his opposition to Henderson's decision to join the government in a letter in Labour Leader, claiming that the trade unions and the ILP should have discussed it. "The ILP should not be tied to this Coalition Capitalist Government".
- 144 Midland Chronicle, 12 April 1918.
- 145 Bailey had shown where his sympathies lay when he presided over a meeting on the 18 March 1918, addressed by Tom Mann, who said that "Bolsheviks were standing for the same principles he had stood for and had been advocating for the last thirty years". Ibid., 22 March 1918 and 12 April 1918.
- 146 Pickerill, D., has reproduced the letter of resignation in the Appendices of an unpublished 'History of the West Bromwich Labour Party' in Smethwick Library.
- 147 Roberts was born in the village of East Haddon, Northants, where his father was a bootmaker, shopkeeper and village postmaster. He was apprenticed to the printing trade in Northampton, from where he entered the Typographical Association. Daily Herald, 12 April 1923 in Labour Party Records.
- 148 The Millgate Monthly, November 1921, Volume xvii Part I No. 194 in the Labour Party Records.
- 149 Midland Chronicle, 20 September 1918.
- 150 Ibid., 25 October 1918.
- 151 Brigadier General Hickman, MP for Bilston spoke on Lewisham's behalf, pleading support on the grounds of "the part he played as commander of the Staffordshire Yeomanry in the magnificent campaigns in Palestine". Birmingham Post, 6 December 1918.
- 152 Midland Chronicle, 29 November 1918. Hazel wrote "I feel bound to add that it seems to me undesirable that an advanced Liberal and a Labour candidate should be fighting each other at the same time"
- 153 Birmingham Gazette, 14 December 1918.
- 154 Midland Chronicle, 29 November 1918.
- 155 See Birmingham Borough Labour Party Minute Book, 28 November 1918 and Footnote 91.
- 156 Results of West Bromwich Municipal Elections of the 26 October 1918:-

Tartary Ward

Elected :-

Mrs J. Cotterell (Ind)	1,074
F. Allen. (Prog)	1,000



S. Crump (Ind) 991

Defeated :-

H. Brockhouse (Lab) 821

J.H. Wills (Lab) 748

A A.G. Garnett (Prog) 710

T. Smith (Lab) 625

Mrs Langley Browne (Prog) 583

Lyng Ward

Elected :-

Dr. J. Selwyn Edwards (Ind) 1,113

Miss L.E. Hazel (Prog) 802

J.D. Holland (Lab) 747

Defeated :-

J.T. Sutton (Lab) 742

E. Arthur (Lab) 593

Mrs. H. Parrish (Ind) 568

B. J. Hackett (Ind) 556

J.W. Henn (Prog) 345

R. Beetlestone (Prog) 321

Midland Chronicle, 1 November 1918.

157 Results of two by elections in West Bromwich on 23 November :-

Town Hall

J.J. Sutton (Lab) 839 elected

Captain J.G. Simcox (Ind) 647

Hill Top

H. Brockhouse (Lab) 638 elected

W.T. Poultney (Prog) 602 elected

S.J. Brown (Ind) 533

Birmingham Gazette, 25 November 1918.

158 From 'What Roberts stands for !' a Labour poster. Midland Chronicle 29 November 1918. Roberts

also stood for a League of Nations, new homes with gardens, an end to conscription and food

profiteering, nationalisation of land, mines transport and light and Home Rule for Ireland.

159 A full account of the campaign can be found in Ward, J. (1993), pp.48-54.

160 The Millgate Monthly 1921, Volume xvii Part I No. 194 in the Labour Party Records.

161 Birmingham Mail, 7 December 1918.

162 Birmingham Gazette, 10 December 1918

163 West Bromwich Free Press, 3 January 1919. "The three main causes of his Lordship's defeat were the unfortunate absence of the candidate throughout the contest, the apathy of the great part of the electorate... and weakness in organisation".

164 Midland Chronicle, 3 January 1919. Birmingham Gazette, 30 December 1918.

- 165 Taylor, E. (1974), p. 432.
- 166 McKibbin, R. (1974), p.75.
- 167 Birmingham Gazette, 26 November 1918. Short was said to be a specialist in matters concerning housing and public health. Stenton, M. and Lees, S. (Eds) Who's Who of British Members of Parliament Volume 3 1918-1945 (1979).
- 168 Birmingham Gazette, 10 December 1918.
- 169 Midland Advertiser and Wednesbury Herald, 30 November 1918.
- 170 Ibid., 23 November 1918. Maconochie had been a Liberal Unionist MP for Aberdeen 1900-1906. Wolverhampton Express and Star, 4 December 1918.
- 171 Ibid., 14 December 1918.
- 172 Midland Advertiser and Wednesbury Herald, 7 December 1918.
- 173 Tipton Herald, 7 December 1918.
- 174 Ibid.
- 175 Wolverhampton Express and Star, 4 December 1918.
- 176 Editorial in the Midland Advertiser and Wednesbury Herald, 4 January 1919.
- 177 Biographies of Charlie Sitch in Stenton, M. and Lees, S. (Eds) Who's Who of British Members of Parliament Volume 3 1918-1945 (1979) and in the Dictionary of Labour Biography Volume 2, (1974), pp.345-6.
- 178 Wolverhampton Express and Star, 4 December 1918.
- 179 Barnsby, G. (1998), p.311.
- 180 Taylor, Eric (1974) biography of Charlie Sitch in Dictionary of Labour Biography Volume 2 (1974), p.345-6.
- 181 Dudley Herald, 4 January 1919.
- 182 Sitch denied that MacDonald and Snowden were leading the Labour Party. They were in the ILP, "which was distinct and separate from the national party". Wolverhampton Express and Star, 7 December 1918.
- 183 The Wolverhampton Express and Star reported:- "A general feeling that 'Our Charlie'.... will head the poll. The splitting of the Coalition vote by Mr Beck (Liberal) and Mr Brown (Conservative) has weakened the cause of the government, for many of the electors are at a loss to know who is the real Coalition candidate." Ibid., 14 December 1918



- 184 Birmingham Mail, 17 December 1918.
- 185 Hamilton, Mary Agnes Mary MacArthur (1925), p.173.
- 186 Dictionary of Labour Biography Volume 2 (1974), pp.255-9.
- 187 The Times, 29 November 1918.
- 188 Dictionary of Labour Biography Volume 2 (1974), p.255-9.
- 189 The Times, 29 November 1918. MacArthur's claim to be the first woman parliamentary candidate was as a result of her being adopted "before the latest act".
- 190 Wolverhampton Express and Star, 4 December 1918.
- 191 The Times, 14 December 1918.
- 192 Birmingham Gazette, 3 December 1918.
- 193 Ibid., 30 November 1918.
- 194 The Times, 29 November 1918.
- 195 "Mr Fisher, however, will probably take care that the electors understand that Miss MacArthur has associations with, even if she does not openly sympathise with, the advanced pacifist wing of the Labour Party". Ibid.
- 196 Birmingham Gazette, 6 December 1918.
- 197 Ibid., 13 December 1918. An extract from the Woman Worker, January 1919 shows the nature of her support. Whilst in Lye she was met by "a procession of workers straight from the forge with black hands and black faces. Silently they surrounded the car... Suddenly they began to sing the song 'Kind, kind and gentle is she, kind is our Mary'. Hamilton, Mary Agnes (1925), p.174.
- 198 Birmingham Gazette, 11 December 1918.
- 199 The Times, 14 December 1918.
- 200 Birmingham Gazette, 2 December 1918.
- 201 Ibid., 12 December 1918.
- 202 Birmingham Post, 9 December 1918.
- 203 Hamilton, Mary Agnes (1925), p.176.
- 204 Birmingham Gazette, 31 December 1918.
- 205 Pelling, H. (1967), pp.184-5.
- 206 Tanner, D. (1990), p.394.
- 207 Taylor, E. (1974), pp.459-60. Also Jones G. (1969), p.48.

- 208 Wolverhampton Labour Party Minutes, Executive Committee Meeting, 3 April 1918.
- 209 Ibid., Local Party Meetings, 4 July 1918 and 1 August 1918. The Labour Party Annual Report gives a return of £7/10 for Wolverhampton in 1918, which included the East division, which had not yet been organised. Other local parties gave only the £1/10 minimum or made no recorded contribution. Labour Party Annual Report 1919, P93-109. See Appendices Table F.
- 210 Wolverhampton Labour Party Minutes, Executive Meeting 24 April 1918, Delegates Meeting, 6 June 1918.
- 211 Ibid., Local Party Meeting, 5 September 1918.
- 212 Ibid., Local Party Meeting, 6 June 1918. The exact composition of the Executive Committee was to be:- 8 Trade Unionists, 1 Socialist Societies, 2 Individual Women, 2 Individual Men and 2 from the Co-operative Movement when affiliated.
- 213 The Co-operative Society was allowed to elect 12 delegates to the local Labour Party and 5 to the Central Party. Ibid., Executive Meeting, 25 July 1918.
- 214 Ibid., Executive Meeting, 24 April 1918.
- 215 Ibid., Local Party Meeting, 4 July 1918.
- 216 Ibid., Executive Committee Meeting, 26 September 1918. It was reported that there was a need for a public meeting with a national speaker. Examples of the responses were:-
- Merridale and St. Marks - small attendances.
- St George's – endeavouring to get workers.
- St. Johns – very poor attendance
- Blakenhall – fair attendance
- St. Matthews – no report of meeting
- Graisley – fair attendance.
- 217 Ibid., Executive Committee Meetings, 6 June 1918, Delegates Meeting, 5 September 1918, Executive Committee Meeting, 26 September 1918.
- 218 Jones, G. (1969), p.46.
- 219 Birmingham Gazette, 9 December 1918, Wolverhampton Express and Star, 12 December 1918.
- 220 Gardner, K.D. (1994), pp.35-37.
- 221 Wolverhampton Express and Star, 12 December 1918.



- 222 See Bird's Electoral Address of 25 November 1918. He put forward five subjects for immediate attention :- 1. Housing and the abolition of slums 2. A Ministry of Health 3. Adequate provision for the disabled and demobilised 4. Fair and equitable provision for mothers, war widows and orphans. 5. Other subjects of national and industrial importance as in Lloyd George's programme. Gardner, K.D. (1994), p.77.
- 223 Wolverhampton Express and Star, 12 December 1918. See also Gardner, K.D. (1994), p77.
- 224 Bird was seen as a supporter of "stern justice". His proposals included:- 1. Expelling every German from the country. 2. Germans to be prohibited from entering the country for ten years. 3. Germans to replace every ship sunk. 4. Germans to compensate our widows and orphans. 5. Germans to compensate the wounded and disabled too. 6. Germans to pay the expenses of the war. 7. German war criminals to be put on trial, including the Kaiser. Wolverhampton Express and Star, 3 December 1918.
- 225 "On 28 March 1917 he had voted for A.C.Salter's amendment against the adoption of the recommendations of the Speaker's Conference to extend the franchise to all men and women over thirty and on 6 June 1917 he had voted for Sir Frederick Banbury's amendment to the same Bill, which would have postponed the franchise extensions". Page, P. 'Candidacy and Campaigning in Wolverhampton Parliamentary Elections 1900-1918'. M.A. Thesis, University of Wolverhampton (1985), p.68.
- 226 Wolverhampton Express and Star, 12 December 1918.
- 227 Page, P. (1985), pp.65-67.
- 228 Ibid., p.69.
- 229 Ibid., p.67.
- 230 At a meeting in Wolverhampton in May 1916 Shaw experienced "heckling and interruptions", but at Bilston in November he was listened to "without disturbance" Barnsby, G. (1998), p.310.
- 231 Wolverhampton Express and Star, 12 December 1918.
- 232 Ibid., 5 December 1918.
- 233 Ibid., 11 and 13 December 1918. Hickman had also been a member of the Provisional Government in Ulster.
- 234 Birmingham Gazette, 4 December 1918.
- 235 Ibid., 9 and 11 December 1918.

236 Wolverhampton Express and Star, 5 December 1918.

237 Powell's letter was described as "a bombshell to electors":-

'While on service in Macedonia I found out that this man had seduced my wife and an illegitimate son was born. Major Knyston is still living with my wife and divorce proceedings are pending. They have my daughter with them, a young girl of 15 years, who has a separate income. He has systematically ill-treated the child and tells her she is a pauper. The only reason for keeping the child is that the mother draws her income till she is of age.

Ibid., 14 December 1918.

238 Ibid.

239 The M.C.T.F., itself, had a policy of strict political neutrality in both local and parliamentary elections. Taylor, E. (1974), p.38.

240 Brown, K. 'The Trade Union Tariff Reform Association, 1904-1913' in Journal of British Studies, Volume ix Part 2 1970, pp.141-53.

241 Barnsby, G. (1998), p.314.

242 There were reports that "Steer's credentials were challenged by some Labour supporters.

Birmingham Mail, 7 December 1918.

243 Steer spoke of his "total opposition to conscription". Wolverhampton Express and Star, 11 December 1918.

244 Birmingham Post, 28 November 1918.

245 Ibid., 3 December 1918.

246 Wolverhampton Express and Star, 14 December 1918.

247 Birmingham Post, 11 December 1918.

248 A 20 per cent bonus was announced. Birmingham Mail, 7 December 1918.

249 Birmingham Gazette, 3 December 1918.

250 Ibid., 2 December 1918.

251 Wolverhampton Express and Star, 3 December 1918.

252 Dudley Herald, 4 January 1919.

253 Tanner, D. (1990), p.182.

254 Brown said:- 'If I could stand for Walsall as a Lib-Lab nothing would give me a greater pleasure'.  
Dean, K.G. (1972), p.13.



- 255 Brown declared that on the main issues he and Labour members “were not divided by a hair’s breadth”. He warned that if the Conservatives won the next election “every privilege which trade unionists held dear would be in danger the next day”. Tanner, D. (1990), p.183.
- 256 Deakin, who died in 1937 aged 79, was said in this biography to be behind any Labour success in this period, although not holding public office himself. His propaganda was said to be behind improvements in housing, sanitation and working conditions for municipal employees Dictionary of Labour Biography Volume 2 (1974), p.58.
- 257 Dean, K.G. (1972), pp.20-3 for the early years of the Walsall Labour Party. He claims that in Walsall in 1914 there were branches of the Fabian Society, the Walsall Independent Council, the ILP, the British Socialist Party, the Socialist Club and the Walsall Labour Association.
- 258 Dean, K.G. (1972), pp.36-44.
- 259 The National Party (NP) had been formed in 1917 under the leadership of Brigadier-General Henry Page Croft. It aimed at complete victory in the war, eradication of German interests, propriety in government, co-operation between employer and employed, safeguarding of industries, Empire unity and defence, national social policy and a planned policy of demobilisation and reconstruction. In the post-war years it adopted “an uncompromising anti-Bolshevik and anti-syndicalist stance”. It has been seen as an incipient fascist organisation in that it sought “to transcend party and class politics, to mobilise a threatened middle class and to promote a corporate doctrine of industrial relations”. Linehan, Thomas (2000), pp.42-3.
- 260 Dean, K.G. (1972), p.81.
- 261 Ibid., p.84.
- 262 Ibid., p.81. Walsall’s electorate tripled in 1918 from 15,949 to 42,953 of whom 16,854 were women. Ibid., p.82.
- 263 Cooper’s Election Address stated:- “Cooper demands the extreme punishment. Cooper demands that we must keep forever the German colonies. Cooper insists that we must seize ship for ship and ton for ton for the ships she has sunk. Cooper stands firm for indemnity by Germany of every penny that the war has cost with full payment (so far as money can meet it) for all the loss sustained”.
- 264 Birmingham Gazette, 5 December 1918.
- 265 Cooper’s Election Address.

- 266 Dean, K.G. (1972), p.84.
- 267 Walsall Observer, 14 December 1918.
- 268 Thickett's Manifesto called for a League of Nations, whilst Labour's Call to The People stressed A Peace of Reconciliation.
- 269 Walsall Observer, 7 December 1918.
- 270 Dean, K.G. (1972), p.84.
- 271 Birmingham Post, 9 December 1918. Power, whose organisation represented all trade unionists in the leather industry in Walsall, said, "he saw nothing to be gained by a change of ministers".
- 272 Birmingham Mail, 7 December 1918.
- 273 Walsall Observer, 30 November 1918.
- 274 Birmingham Gazette, 9 December 1918.
- 275 Thickett's Manifesto and Labour's Call to the People.
- 276 Wolverhampton Express and Star, 14 December 1918.
- 277 Cooper's Election Address.
- 278 Pelling H. (1967), p.187.
- 279 Jones G. (1969), pp.23-24.
- 280 Pelling, G. (1967), p.184.
- 281 Birmingham Gazette, 25 November 1918.
- 282 Jones, G. (1969), p.37.
- 283 Ibid., p.43. Radical Liberals fought municipal elections between 1903-1910 as Progressives under Councillor Bantock.
- 284 Birmingham Gazette, 7 December 1918. The MCTF The Midland Counties Trades Federation was a union of craftsmen in various trades across the Black Country. In the pre war years it succeeded in setting up Wage Boards in many of the crafts. The introduction of machine methods with semi skilled and unskilled workers led to a steady decline, although it lingered into the 1930s. See Taylor, E. 'The Midland Counties Trades Federation 1886-1914' in Midland History 1, (Spring 1972), pp.26-40.
- 285 Wolverhampton Express and Star, 10 December 1918.
- 286 Birmingham Gazette, 11 December 1918.



287 The Liberal Association did indeed state that they would back Labour in the West division. Ibid., 9 December 1918.

288 These were the words in a telegram sent by T.P.O'Connor MP to Irish voters. Ibid., 11 December 1918.

289 Wolverhampton Express and Star, 13 December 1918

290 The Conservatives had hoped to put up Lt. Commander W.S.Windham, but decided to back Thorne. Gardner, K.D. (1994). On the organisation of the Conservatives in this division see Leo Amery's comment in 1908 at the time of a by-election in the constituency, at which he stood as the Unionist candidate:- 'I hardly expected so little as I found..... beyond the score or so who adopted me, there were very few traces'. Quoted in G. Jones (1969), pp.54-5 from Leo Amery My Political Life Volume 1 (1953), pp. 276-7.

291 Birmingham Gazette, 9 December 1918.

292 Shaw claimed that "he had advocated trade unionism in season and out of season, in places where his critics dared not open their mouths". Wolverhampton Express and Star, 3 December 1918.

293 He was also described as having done "yeoman service" during the war "in combating the pacifism in the Labour ranks". Ibid., 13 December 1918.

294 Shaw's Manifesto. He put forward eleven points. These were:- 1. Priority treatment for ex-servicemen. 2. His life-long championing of the cause of the worker. 3. His support for the war and opposition to 'Pacifists' and 'Bolsheviks'. 4. His support for the Coalition. 5. His support for health and housing reforms. 6. More rights for women. 7. Support for agriculture to secure more self-sufficiency. 8. Higher education to be opened to all with ability. 9. Opposition to Bolshevism and violent revolution. 10. Removal of German aliens. 11. Opposition to the dumping of German goods.

295 Wolverhampton Express and Star, 4 December 1918.

Birmingham Gazette, 12 December 1918.

296 Page, P. (1985), p.35.

297 See Appendices Tables B and D.

298 Ramsden, J. The Age of Balfour and Baldwin 1902-1940 (1978), p.115. Ramsden also writes that "in the shared community of sacrifice the party had undoubtedly widened its community of

interest with the British people and was able to speak for all the people in 1917-18 as it had spoken for an embattled half in 1913”.

299 Tanner D. (1990), pp.412-3.

300 In West Yorkshire only one Coalition candidate (a Conservative) was defeated (by a Liberal). One Labour candidate was returned unopposed. This compares with three Labour MPs in the previous Parliament. Reynolds, J. and Laybourn, K. (1987), p.37.

301 According to Tanner in such areas Liberal emphasis on “industrial prosperity through union / management co-operation and Free Trade” along with New Liberalism was more appropriate than Labour’s Statism. Tanner D. (1990), p.414.

302 Ibid., p.413.

303 Turner, J. (1992), pp.423-4.

304 Tanner, D. (1990), p.399.

305 Labour’s organisation in Birmingham was so weak that the Party could not even find a list of members. Ibid., p.399.

306 The union, which contributed most to the Birmingham Labour Party, was the NUR. Ibid., p.402.

307 Matthew, H.C.G., McKibbin, R and Kay, J.A. (1976), p.726.

308 Dean, K.G. (1972), p.82.

309 Davison, in particular, expressed some dissatisfaction with the local press, saying that it had not given “a true report of some of the magnificent meetings we have held”. The Smethwick Telephone responded by claiming “we only reiterate what is common knowledge when we say that in no town has Labour been more fully reported or received fairer treatment at the hands of the local press”. Smethwick Telephone, 4 January 1919.

310 Evening Dispatch, 31 December 1918.

311 An editorial in the Wolverhampton Express and Star pointed out that “from the outset we have made it quite clear that we desire to see the three gentlemen, who have so admirably represented Wolverhampton in the last Parliament represent it in the next. All three have loyally supported the war policy of the government and if elected they will continue to do so”.  
Wolverhampton Express and Star, 11 December 1918.



## CHAPTER 2 – 1919-1922

### A. NATIONAL DEVELOPMENTS

Although the Labour Party had secured only 57 seats nationally in the 1918 General Election, they were expected to make bigger advances in the years that followed. It was generally accepted that circumstances had been against Labour in 1918 with Lloyd George able to exploit post-war patriotic feeling to the advantage of his Coalition.<sup>(1)</sup> With a return to peacetime issues, however, it was expected that Labour would benefit, especially as they were now the main opposition. Indeed Conservative politicians at the time saw the Lloyd George Coalition as a bulwark against the threat of Labour, which the prime minister himself was ready to promote in order to preserve his government.<sup>(2)</sup> Lloyd George hoped to advance policies that were sufficiently populist to keep the Labour Party at bay. Since his government was dominated by Conservatives, however, it was to be very restricted in what it could achieve.

The Labour Party in 1919 was very much dominated by the trade unions, who made up the majority of party membership and provided most of the finances. It enabled them to control both the NEC and the Party Conference. Many of Labour's strongholds tended to be in small industrial towns or mining communities, where there were strong class loyalties, rather than in the big cities.<sup>(3)</sup> Morgan sees the trade unions at this time as sectional in their interests and limited in their political responses. He points, for instance, to their refusal to accept 'dilution' or more apprenticeships in the building trade, which handicapped Labour's criticism of Lloyd George's housing programme.<sup>(4)</sup>

During 1919 support for Labour grew as post-war shortages and conscription continued. With the economy experiencing a short-lived boom, there was a certain degree of confidence amongst the working class. This was reflected in the political successes, which Labour achieved at this time. Thus John Robertson could proclaim in 1919 following his success at the Bothwell by-election that "the workers were the governing class". Cowling writes that it was "an assault on deference as much as the threat to property", which most alarmed the establishment.<sup>(5)</sup>

It was, however, the industrial aspect of the Labour movement, which seemed most threatening to the government at this time. There were strikes and the threat of strikes as workers sought to maintain their wartime gains in status, wages and hours of work. Indeed strike action throughout the country averaged 40 million days a year between 1919-1922.<sup>(6)</sup> There was much talk of direct action by workers, especially after the threat of a general strike successfully blocked the supply of arms to Poland

in August 1920. The government in its turn brought in an Emergency Powers Act to safeguard supplies.

The most serious confrontation for the government came with the coal miners. With the price of coal falling, they decided to hand the mines back to private owners, who insisted on swingeing pay cuts and locally fixed wages. When the miners rejected these terms, a lockout was ordered from 31 March 1921. On the 15<sup>th</sup> April 1921, however, the rail and transport workers leaders refused to strike in support of the miners in what became known as Black Friday. Nevertheless the coal dispute was to last for three months. It ended with the miners being forced to accept most of the owners' terms, which included a standard wage based on the July 1914 rate plus a minimum of 20%. This was to represent a severe drop in living standards for the miners, especially for those in the Black Country, whose pits were amongst the least economic in the country.

By this time also the economy was beginning to turn down, so that in June 1921 unemployment had risen nationally to exceed 2 million. This had an adverse effect on trade union membership with the number of those affiliated to the Labour Party falling by a quarter between 1920-22, although this was partly offset within the party by increased fees.(7) Talk of direct action now receded and a more cautious approach was adopted. Official Labour leaders, who had kept their distance from this activity, were now able to re-establish their control over the movement, calling for parliamentary action and collective bargaining. They could point to Labour's successes in by-elections as the model to follow.

Between 1919-1922 Labour secured 14 by-election successes, whilst losing only one seat. The continued division within the Liberal Party helped them. Furthermore in local elections in 1919 Labour gained control of 3 counties.(8) They also made big gains in the municipal elections, winning over 500 seats in London boroughs along with control of 12 metropolitan boroughs.(9) Outside London 400 seats were won. Labour's performance has been described as "the most dramatic result" of the period with the party winning "an electoral landslide".(10) This success came despite the franchise for local elections being less favourable for Labour, as many of the newly enfranchised parliamentary voters, living in furnished rooms, were not eligible for the vote. It was still necessary to be a householder to qualify.(11)

The municipal results of 1920 have been described as rather "flat".(12) Labour experienced heavy losses in London which Herbert Morrison attributed to the rate increases in Labour controlled boroughs.(13) It was also evident that Labour successes, along with the activities of the trade unions,



was bringing something of a reaction, especially in the form of anti-Socialist pacts between Conservatives and Liberals. Egerton Wake, the national agent, in his report on the 1920 results, wrote of “the forces of reaction (reorganising) themselves.... under various new guises as Independents, Moderates, Municipal Reformers, Citizens’ Leagues and Ratepayers’ Associations”. He also claimed that the press had “endeavoured to create the impression that because Labour’s advance was not as marked this year, our party had received a serious setback. The balance of gains and losses over the country.... show a substantial advance”.(14)

In 1921 unemployment rose to over 2 million. This was also the year that the Anti-Waste movement was set up, backed by Lord Rothermere, the newspaper proprietor.(15) It was intended to appeal to the lower middle class by attacking Labour authorities over their spending programmes. Nevertheless in the municipal elections of that year Labour made further advances with 36 net gains.(16)

The 1922 municipal elections were held just two weeks before the General Election and proved a setback for Labour Nationally there were 168 losses and only 5 gains. 215 Labour candidates were successful but 359 were defeated.(17) Labour did particularly badly in London, where they had achieved a breakthrough three years earlier. The Birmingham Mail commented that “these communities have had a spell of Labour government and in practically every case have seen the rates soar up as a result of extravagant and inefficient administration”.(18) Yet Arthur Henderson’s comment reflected the situation outside the capital:- “The success of the anti-Labour counter offensive, which has enabled Labour’s opponents to recover a little of the ground they lost in 1919, but which still leaves Labour in possession of the greater part of the political territory wrested from its opponents is not much of a victory to write home about”.(19)

In 1922 the Coalition Government fell, as the bulk of the Conservatives no longer felt the need to keep Lloyd George as Prime Minister, such had his popularity fallen. The new Conservative Government under Bonar Law called a General Election, having dropped from its party manifesto anything “contentious”, which “might threaten party unity”.(20) This meant renewing the 1913 pledge not to introduce tariffs without another election. The Conservatives fought the 1922 Election with few policy pledges of their own. Instead emphasis was put on Labour’s extremism and the Liberal’s divisions, whilst adopting a “safety first” appeal for themselves.(21) The Labour Party was now taken more seriously, with a propaganda campaign equating it with the Bolsheviks in Russia. Labour’s tax and spending policies also came under greater scrutiny than in 1918. The Conservative’s response to

the economic position was to warn of further job losses if Labour were elected. Although ruling out Protection, the Party emphasised the apparent success of the Safeguarding of Industries Act, under which certain developing industries such as the manufacturing of motor cars were protected by tariffs.

Labour went into the General Election with the benefit of being the main critic of the Coalition, having attacked its foreign policy, its apparent abandonment of social reform and its support for Safeguarding rather than Free Trade. The party called for full employment, public housing and nationalisation of the mines and railways. Labour also proposed a capital levy as a means of reducing the National Debt, although it was to be downplayed during the campaign after it was attacked as a threat to employment.(22)

In the Election Labour had 414 candidates, losing 19 seats but gaining 86. This gave them a total of 142 MPs, making them effectively the second Party. Labour's total vote rose from 2.2 million in 1918 to 4.2 million, which was 29.4 per cent of the total. 39 of their gains were in mining seats, whilst the remainder were mostly in Glasgow, Greater London, Tyneside and Sheffield.(23) The Conservatives secured 386 seats with 38.5 per cent of the vote, although 42 of their seats were uncontested. The real losers were the still divided Liberal Party, with the Coalition Liberals under Lloyd George winning 9.4 per cent of the vote and 57 seats, whilst Asquith's Liberals obtained 18.9 per cent of the vote but only 68 seats.(24)

Labour's performance, however, was not consistent across the country. Cook has pointed out that the party lost ground in 85 seats, performing badly in agricultural areas, as well as in the textile districts of East Lancashire and West Yorkshire. He has calculated that there were 284 seats, where Labour had only minimal support or failed even to stand. He concludes that "the party, although on the road to becoming a truly national party, still had far to go".(25)

Efforts were made to improve party organisation during this period. The NEC appointed four standing sub committees to develop policies and win support.(26) Egerton Wake became the national agent. He was responsible for organising a number of regional conferences, which were addressed by important speakers.(27) A Women's Section was formed under Dr. Marion Phillips. It had a number of regional organisers, appointed to attract women voters. By 1923 the national agent reported that the party had 1,031 Women's Sections with 120,000 members.(28) The number of full time agents also increased to 133 by 1922.(29) At the same time the number of constituency parties rose, so that by 1923 only 6 of the 603 constituencies were without one.(30)



McKibbin sees Labour's growth in this period as a consequence of the energy and effectiveness of local parties. "The enemy was taken aback by the intensity and vigour of Labour's attack. What Labour lost in cars and money was more than made up by volunteer support and energetic canvassing".(31) McKibbin stresses the importance of the increased centralisation of the party structure, whilst stating that "at least until 1924" the development of local parties was almost totally dependent on the membership and finances of the trade unions.(32) Labour's success in draining the Liberals of their support by the early 1920s was due partly to the extension of the franchise but also to mobilising the class consciousness of the industrial working class. With the party putting more emphasis on organisation than policy, there was to be less stress on socialist policies.(33) Although generally optimistic about Labour's growth at this time, McKibbin still recognises the party's limitations. He goes on to state that "much of the social and political history of the Labour Party in these years is a history of failure". In particular he compares Labour's achievements unfavourably with the situation in Germany where the trade unions and the Social Democratic Party had combined closely to embrace the working class much more comprehensively.(34)

A more extensive criticism of Labour's performance at this time has been made by Howard, who has questioned the advantage of Labour's close links with the unions. Howard believes that the Party failed to broaden its appeal, which prevented it from developing a mass membership(35). Savage is even more critical of the trade unions in his study of the Labour Party in Preston, where he claims that such was the control of the AEU over the local party, that they actively used it for their own sectional interests, which seriously restricted the party's development.(36) They delayed organising a Women's Section and appeared hostile to state maternity and child welfare schemes, although not to council housing schemes.(37) During the engineers lockout of 1922, the AEU were even able to expel the Workers' Union and the NUGMW.(38)

Reynolds and Laybourn portray a different situation in their study of the West Yorkshire Labour movement. They see an improvement in local organisation during the 1920's. This enabled Labour to win two by-elections in the region in 1919-20, although the party was helped by the split in the Liberal vote in three-cornered contests.(39) The authors look at the appointment of party agents, appeals to women voters and the establishment of a local press as examples of improved organisation.(40) Local parties were dominated by trade unions, as were candidates for elections, but the alternative was to

bring in a wealthy personality with his own finances. This was not always considered a wise move and certainly not recommended by Herbert Morrison.(41)

Thorpe in his study of the Labour Party in Derby at this time stresses the advantages to the local party of the three powerful trade unions that dominated it. They provided strong financial support and responsible leadership, enabling the party to advance during the period.(42) The situation was helped by the tolerant attitude of the employers towards the trade unions and local Labour politics. The Liberal decline here was also important for Labour, as the local party retreated from its radical stance into pacts with the Conservatives.(43)

## **B. REGIONAL DEVELOPMENTS**

### **1. ECONOMIC BACKGROUND**

In the early 1920s the Black Country was hit by a serious economic recession. Yet in the first two post-war years the economy was buoyant. With full employment, trade unions were able to secure some significant successes for their members. Nationally membership of the Workers' Union, for instance, peaked at 379,000 members in 1919 with 200,000 in engineering.(44) The economy turned down, however, in the autumn of 1920, so that unemployment rose dramatically in 1921.

Figures show the numbers of unemployed in the region on 18 March 1921 to be:- Birmingham 69,587, Cradley Heath 4,444, Dudley 3,694, Smethwick 6,323, Walsall 6,220, West Bromwich 3,253 and Wolverhampton 9,829.(45) By 3 June 1921 the numbers had risen to:- Birmingham 93,019, Cradley Heath 9,909, Dudley 6,301, Smethwick 8,673, Walsall 8,786, West Bromwich 5,818 and Wolverhampton 12,756.(46) The figures for 1921, which were distorted by the miners' strike, were worse in the region than at any time during the 1930's Depression. The numbers began to fall in the second half of the year and during 1922. Nevertheless Barnsby gives the rate of unemployment at the end of 1922 as 22 per cent for Dudley, 13 per cent for West Bromwich and 19 per cent for Smethwick. In January 1923 he gives the rate as 17 per cent for Wolverhampton and 14 per cent for Walsall.(47)

One major reason why the Black Country was badly affected at this time was the decline of its staple industries. Coal mining, for instance, was already hit by the exhaustion of its best seams and by flooding, with the attendant cost of pumping operations. This was an issue which Short, the local Labour MP, raised in Parliament. In the Tipton area pumping arrangements had broken down, leading to a loss of 20 million tons of coal and ironstone along with the closure of 12 pits.(48) The coal dispute



of 1921 only intensified these problems. Production dropped from 2 million tons in 1920 to below 1 million in 1921, whilst the number of miners fell from 9,910 in 1920 to 7,362 in 1921.(49) The dispute also affected many local industries, as they were dependent on coal as a fuel. In the glass industry, for instance, 90% of workers were unemployed in June 1921 due to the dispute.(50)

The iron and steel industries, which had boomed during the war years, were affected by a downturn in orders and competition from more competitive regions and countries.(51) The iron industry was also hit by a long industrial dispute between September 1919 and January 1920, in which 6.8 million days were lost. At the time this proved to be the third biggest strike ever in the country.(52) The output of puddled bars used for making wrought iron fell from 1.2 million tons in 1913 to 0.3 million in 1924.(53) The price of iron also dropped dramatically after 1921, which in turn led to a similar drop in wages, as the two were linked.(54) Other industries in decline in the post-war years included the hollow-ware industry, hand chainmaking in Cradley Heath, and the leather trade in Walsall, which was hit by the declining use of horses.(55)

The ironfounders' dispute over a 15 shillings a week rise, had a big impact on the Black Country, especially as John Davison, the MP for Smethwick, was a prominent official in the union. There was also much support from local Trades Councils, which set up funds to relieve distress.(56) The strike, however, was doomed by disunity as other unions kept their members at work. Following the Ironfounders defeat in January 1920, the verdict of the Town Crier was that it was "an object lesson to the workers on the value of unity and the suicidal policy of sectional strikes and internecine warfare between unions".(57) In a speech in Smethwick J.H.Thomas made a similar comment, whilst observing that the employers had "closed ranks" and fought the strike through "one body".(58)

This was the first of several setbacks for trade unions during this period. In February 1921, for instance, women and girls in the nut and bolt trade in Darlaston went on strike over a wage reduction. They were eventually forced to accept the new terms.(59) The main confrontation during 1921, however, was to be in the coalmines, as the government sought to return the industry to private ownership, which invariably meant worse conditions for the miners. The dispute was to be particularly bitter in the Black Country. John Richards, President of the South Staffordshire and East Worcestershire Miners' Association, said :- "The public.... could not but be on the side of the Black Country collier.... On the basis of the new terms he would not be able to get more than 50 shillings a week, which was considerably below the poverty line".(60)



Moreover, with the men locked out, pumpmen and enginemen were withdrawn. The local press reported that this threatened the complete flooding of many Black Country mines, as those in the Rowley region were “only normally workable by continuous pumping”.<sup>(61)</sup> In the previous year a Committee of Inquiry had recommended the abandonment of mines in the Tipton area as “waterlogged beyond redemption”, in order to concentrate on those in the Old Hill and Oldbury region.<sup>(62)</sup> The local press now reported a “serious position” with one of the largest mines in the Old Hill region, Ramrod Hall, described as “completely flooded” and much of the region “drowned out like Tipton”.<sup>(63)</sup> When pumping was eventually resumed 40 mines had been flooded. Most were abandoned.<sup>(64)</sup>

The miners themselves experienced much hardship since, although they claimed to have been locked out, they were refused unemployment benefit and forced to turn to the Poor Law authorities. There was, however, support from local Trades Councils and Labour Parties, which sought to use the dispute to Labour’s advantage.<sup>(65)</sup> Workers in other industries were also hit. Wages in the iron industry were cut by 22½% in April and May, whilst brickmakers’ wages declined by 10 shillings owing to the dispute.<sup>(66)</sup>

Defeat meant that the day wage for the Black Country miner was cut from 16/1 in March to 13/1 in September.<sup>(67)</sup> It also brought a drop in union membership. In the Old Hill district, for instance, there were 2,400 miners in April 1920 with 1,600 in the union, but by June 1921, when there were 2,200 miners, only 1,200 were members. By 1926, however, the numbers were 2,000 miners with only 587 union members.<sup>(68)</sup>

Engineering was particularly badly hit by the 1921 recession with 27% unemployed compared with 18% nationally. In March 1921, the Engineering Employers’ Federation secured a 20% wage reduction. Then at the end of the year the EEF attacked the AEU over overtime agreements and demanded employers’ rights to “managerial functions”. This led to a lockout of workers in April-May 1922, followed by a further 16s.6d. reduction. The lowest paid suffered the most with some labourers losing 40 per cent of their wages and their real incomes falling to pre 1914 levels. Union membership dropped with the Workers Union reportedly losing as much as 90 per cent of its members in the Birmingham and Coventry areas in 1921-22.<sup>(69)</sup>

With unemployment such a major factor in the region, the Labour Party in Smethwick proposed raising unemployment pay to £2 a week for every householder and 25 shillings for women and single men with allowances for all dependants.<sup>(70)</sup> In Smethwick, where unemployment had risen from 6,323



on 18 March to 9,109 on 24 June, an Unemployed Committee was set up and an attempt was made by W.Salmon to amalgamate it with the Trades Council.(71) This was successfully resisted by Councillor Clem Jones and Alderman Willetts, who were worried by the Committee's attacks on the Labour Party.(72)

During the summer of 1921, the Committee orchestrated a series of marches and demonstrations by the unemployed, in order to secure an increase in the scale of relief from the local Board of Guardians. In this they sought the backing of the Mayor and Town Council.(73) A delegation was also sent to London to the Ministers of Labour and Health to speed up progress.(74) Eventually at the end of September new scales of relief did emerge with a man and wife now receiving 9 shillings of groceries plus 29 shillings in cash.(75)

## 2. POSITION OF THE LABOUR PARTY IN BIRMINGHAM

Despite their lack of success in 1918 the Birmingham Labour Party emerged from the war in a confident mood. During 1919, for instance, delegates were appointed to a 'Hands off Russia Committee'.(76) The local party was also involved in a Council of Action, which included local Communists.(77) In October the Town Crier was launched under the editorship of W.J.Chamberlain and supported by the Birmingham Central Labour Party through its secretary, Fred Rudland.(78) At the municipal elections of November 1919 the local Labour Party stressed social problems, especially housing, claiming that they were not being dealt with either locally or by the Coalition Government. As a result Labour had successes similar to those in London. The Conservatives lost 13 seats, whilst Labour gained 10 overall, giving them 21 on the Council, which was about a sixth of the total.(79)

The Town Crier emphasised the gloom in the local Conservative press about their Party's prospects. According to the Birmingham Post, for instance, "the Unionist Party, at the moment, is a party with a machine that works cumbrously and without either inspiration or enthusiasm". The Birmingham Mail agreed that housing was the main issue and asked, "what was the policy of the Unionist candidate on this?" It gave its answer that it was "an apology for the Housing Committee, of justification for its delays, of putting the blame on to other shoulders".(80)

Elsewhere the press emphasised Labour's positive side with the Birmingham Dispatch writing that "Labour has a policy and a programme that appeals to the imagination. It knows what it wants and is out to get it."(81) The Birmingham Gazette described the results as "a triumph of enthusiasm", giving

two reasons for Labour's success. One was housing, where there were delays "in providing those homes for heroes". The other was the women's vote, which this time had gone "with their husbands".(82)

Labour had an unexpected bonus in 1920, when Eldred Hallas announced that he was severing relations with the organisation, which had secured his election in 1918 and he was recommending the re-affiliation of the Gas, Municipal and General Workers to Labour.(83) In March Hallas rejoined the Party, which appeared to give Labour its first Birmingham MP. A letter from Head Office expressed the hope that "the party was beginning to see the end of the difficulties and differences in Birmingham".(84) It is difficult to assess Hallas's relations with the party, especially as in October he announced that he would not be standing for re-election.(85) By the time of the 1922 Election the press was reporting that "up to a point (Hallas) supported the last Government".(86)

During 1920 Labour set up a branch for the first time in the constituency of West Birmingham, which meant that only Edgbaston of the 12 divisions was now without one.(87) A year later, however, Labour refused to challenge Austen Chamberlain in a by-election in West Birmingham, following his move within the Cabinet to Lord Privy Seal.(88) A more positive achievement for Labour was the decision in June 1920 of George Cadbury to join the party. As a major employer in the city, Cadbury provided Labour with not just influence but also financial support.(89)

A serious problem for Labour at this time, however, was divisions within the Labour Group on the Council. These were first exposed when two of their members, including the chairman, Percival Bower, allowed themselves to be elected to the Aldermanic Bench with the backing of the Unionist Party and in opposition to the official nominees of the Labour Group.(90) Their action was deplored, but no sanctions appear to have been taken against them.(91) Instead during 1921 Group members were asked to sign the Pledge to ensure their loyalty. There was some opposition to this from within the Group, but the Birmingham Party overrode this.(92)

The municipal elections of 1920 coincided with the coal strike in the Black Country. The Birmingham Gazette blamed the effects of this for Labour's poor performance in Birmingham, where 6 seats were lost and only 2 won.(93) The Town Crier, however, pointed to a pact between Unionists and Liberals to keep out Labour.(94) In his annual report to the Birmingham Borough Labour Party Fred Rudland blamed defeat on "the industrial crisis and its exploitation by the government and the big employing combinations, backed by the press".(95)



1921 saw a big increase in unemployment in Birmingham as the effects of the coal strike and the recession took its toll. The total peaked at 93,019 in June, whilst by September Unemployed Committees were being set up.(96) In the 1921 municipal elections the Labour Party did much better in the city, winning 10 of the 15 contested seats and making 6 gains. According to the Birmingham Gazette the Party “had recovered all of the ground lost in the coal strike elections of last year”.(97)

Although unemployment was dropping during 1922, there remained much agitation amongst those out of work. This was directed against the Birmingham Poor Law Guardians, who refused to provide any relief to those on benefit. In August the first post-war hunger march occurred when 30 marched from Birmingham to London.(98) The trade union movement in Birmingham, however, suffered a serious setback during 1922 following the engineers’ lockout. Membership declined along with support for the Labour Party. Thus the 1922 municipal election results were considered by the local press to be a “rebuff” and “a severe blow” for Labour, with the party having a net loss of 3 seats. The local press put this down to the publication by Labour of its national manifesto, which included the capital levy.(99) Yet as the Town Crier pointed out 48,458 voters supported Labour for 6 successes, compared with 49,409 for the Conservatives with 11 successes.(100)

In the 1922 General Election, which followed two weeks later on the 16 November, Labour contested 8 seats, as in 1918. This time the party increased its total vote in Birmingham from 36,000 in 1918 to 70,251, which was 36 per cent of the total in the seats contested. Labour won none of these seats, however, which the Conservatives retained with 106,892 votes. Nevertheless in Kings Norton, Deritend and Sparkbrook the Conservatives won only on a minority of the vote. The Birmingham Gazette thought Labour was “gaining ground” and would find “much to encourage it”.(101) The Town Crier went further, describing the results as “magnificent”, sounding “the death-knell of Unionist domination in Birmingham”.(102)

The Conservatives certainly seemed to have taken the Labour Party seriously this time. Their press put much emphasis on the impact that Labour’s capital levy would have on savings and employment. On Labour’s side the Town Crier pointed to the threats and intimidation at the workplace by employers, which Labour candidates had to contend with. There was, for instance, a report of the managing director of Guest, Keen and Nettleford addressing his workers and telling “horrible stories of Bolshevik misrule in Russia”.(103) After the Election the paper printed a letter sent by Messrs.



I.A. Goldberg & Sons to their workers, warning them of closure and job losses if Labour came to power. This was described as “intimidation of the greatest kind”.(104)

Despite some success in municipal elections it seems evident that the Labour Party had made only modest progress in Birmingham during these years. This is best illustrated by looking at individual membership, although it must be assumed that in working-class constituencies there were many members, who were affiliated through their trade union. Nevertheless between 1919 and 1922 only one Birmingham constituency paid above the minimum of £1/10 in affiliation fees, which at 2d a member represented 180 individual members. This was Yardley, whose members contributed £2/10 in 1919, £3/16/3 in 1920, £3/3/9 in 1921 and £3/5 in 1922.(105)

### 3. THE POSITION OF THE LABOUR PARTY IN THE BLACK COUNTRY

#### A. EARLY POLITICAL SUCCESSES

By 1921 Labour seemed well established in the Black Country. In 1919, H.Drinkwater, the Party's part-time Midland regional organiser, was made one of five full-time organisers. This was described as “a marked forward movement in the political consciousness of Labour”. He inaugurated a series of training classes for agents and other members of the party hoping to qualify as agents. There were already at this time six party agents in the Black Country.(106) Two years later the party appointed Mrs Fawcett as the Women's Organiser for the Midlands.(107)

Meanwhile, the Labour Party had held a number of regional conferences during 1919 to boost support. At one held on 17 May at Kidderminster Charlie Sitch moved a resolution condemning “the vacillatory policy of the government on demobilisation, conscription, pensions and housing”. There was some disagreement over the blockade of Russia with Clem Jones, secretary of the Smethwick Trades Council, calling for the withdrawal of troops from Russia and the raising of the blockade. There was some opposition to this from Workers' Union representatives, who had been prominent in supporting the government's policy during the First World War.(108)

There was to be no dramatic growth in party membership during this period. The Wolverhampton Labour Party, for instance, rushed to boost individual membership during 1918, which resulted in them collecting £7/10 in affiliation fees for that year, which represented 900 members.(109) This was a total, which the local party never again attained during the inter-war period. Most local parties were raising only £1/10 in affiliation fees, which represented the minimum membership of 180.(110) The only



consistent exception to this were the Walsall and West Wolverhampton parties, which both had over 360 members in 1920.(111) This, however, represented a significant decline on the 1918 figure. By 1921 even the West Wolverhampton party was recording the minimum total in affiliation fees.(112) Furthermore with the recession of 1921 the number of affiliated union members also dropped. The Workers' Union, for instance, saw a drop nationally from 180,000 affiliated members in 1920 to 40,000 in 1922.(113)

The consequence of low membership and falling union affiliation was that local parties were in constant financial difficulty. The Wolverhampton Labour Party made regular appeals to trade unions for financial support. At this stage the bulk of this seems to have come from the ASE and the rail unions, although appeals were also made to the Workers' Union.(114) The local party was unwilling to step beyond its remit. Thus when a call came from the Newcastle Labour Party for a special conference on conscription, the withdrawal of British troops from Russia and the raising of the blockade, the local party, whilst showing sympathy, agreed to leave the matter to the next Party Conference.(115) As the 1919 municipal elections approached the local party suggested to their Executive Committee, that they fight more seats, appoint women candidates and draw up a programme.(116)

Labour's first post-war successes in local elections came in the urban district elections of April 1919. This is not surprising as these Councils tended to be in areas of close knit working-class communities, where single industries often dominated. These were the types of areas that had voted Labour in the 1918 General Election. In Tipton, for instance, the local party captured 8 of the 24 seats, whilst in Sedgley, which included the mining district of Lower Gornal, Labour won 7 of the 8 seats that were fought. Meanwhile in Coseley, according to Barnsby, Labour won 11 out of 20 seats, but this is difficult to confirm as the press lists only 17 seats and no party labels. One of Labour's best results came in Rowley Regis, which was part of the Kingswinford parliamentary constituency, where Labour won 5 of the 12 available seats. The party also won 2 out of 4 in Bilston and 2 out of 7 in Oldbury.(117)

By the time of the municipal elections of November 1919 Labour was confident of some success, but in the Black Country the results were to be less dramatic than in Birmingham. In Wolverhampton, where there was a local pact between Conservatives and Liberals to keep Labour out, the Liberal organiser of the pact, Alderman Bantock, agreed with the Conservatives "not to oppose one another's candidates but to work as a Coalition to assist each other's candidates".(118) There was also some



concern for Labour, in that the National Federation of Discharged and Demobilised Soldiers and Sailors was contesting three seats.(119) Labour candidates, who included one woman, Mrs E.Sproson in Park Ward, stood in six of the wards. Altogether Labour made three gains from the Conservatives, who also lost two seats to the National Federation.(120) In the 6 wards that they contested Labour was able to claim 54% of the vote, but the local party commented on “the dearth of workers”.(121)

Labour also gained their first ever seats in Dudley with two victories over combined opposition fighting as Progressives. At the same time Labour won two seats for the first time on Wednesbury council. The local press credited the local party for “the thoroughness of their organisation” and described Labour’s success as “a very severe defeat” for the Conservatives.(122) Labour also made one gain in Walsall.

The Party did less well in West Bromwich, however, where it decided to contest all seven seats. The opposition combined to fight behind the banner of Independents. Labour made only one gain at Greets Green, whilst losing the seat of Town Hall. Councillor Bailey described the election as “dirty, miserable and unclean”, calling on the local Labour Party to secure “a press of their own”(123) There was a similar situation in Smethwick, where in the fight with Independents, Labour gained one seat but lost another. The Town Crier described it as “the forces of reaction (joining) hands to beat the workers”.(124) The anti-Socialist pacts, which were a feature of these elections in the Black Country, help explain why there was no electoral landslide for Labour here at this time. The elections were the first setback for some local parties, which now had to accept that electoral advance would not necessarily be “inexorable”.

The 1920 local elections began with 7 Labour candidates failing to win seats on Sedgley Urban District Council, where they had succeeded the previous year. A seat was also lost in Coseley.(125) In the municipal elections, however, the situation was different with Labour doing much better, despite the coal strike. In West Bromwich, which had the Sandwell Park and Hamstead collieries closed, Labour made two gains in the two seats that they contested.(126) In Smethwick they won two of the four contested seats, making one gain, whilst holding the other two wards uncontested. The Town Crier claimed that “the industrial side of the movement is exceedingly strong in Smethwick”, where there was “a bigger number of trade unionists in the town than in any town of similar size in the country”.(127)



Elsewhere Labour gained two seats from the Liberals in Dudley and one from the Conservatives in Walsall. In Wolverhampton the party gained two seats but lost one. Only in Wednesbury did Labour experience a reversal, gaining one seat but losing two. On the whole, however, Labour increased its support in the Black Country, where electors were less likely to be swayed against the Party by the issue of rising rates due to increased social expenditure. There was also likely to be more sympathy for the miners here than in Birmingham, especially as the local Labour parties were much more closely tied to the union movement.

#### B. THE DUDLEY BY-ELECTION 1921

By the time of the Dudley by-election on the 3 March 1921 the Black Country economy was entering a serious recession. The election was needed because of the promotion to Cabinet rank of the local MP, Sir Arthur Griffith Boscawen, the Minister of Agriculture. In 1918 Boscawen, standing as a Coalition Conservative, had secured a majority of over 3,000. This time Labour brought in an outsider, James Wilson, a railway union official from Newcastle on Tyne, to contest the seat. He was to secure what was to be considered a surprise victory by a majority of 276, making him one of Labour's 14 by-election victors of this Parliament.(128)

Writing of these by-election successes Cook reckons that Dudley was "the only really 'safe' Conservative seat won by Labour" and the victory was "a protest at the Coalition rather than a positive swing to Labour".(129) This is similar to the view expressed in the local press that Boscawen's defeat was due to "a clever but mendacious election stunt". As Minister of Agriculture he was blamed for a dear food policy on account of his "maintaining an embargo on the importation of Canadian cattle".(130)

Lord Beaverbrook's campaign through his Express newspapers to end this embargo is seen as a decisive factor in Boscawen's defeat. The Birmingham Post, for instance, claimed that Boscawen had been "the victim of gross, persistent and malignant misrepresentation". Its editorial claimed that "Mr. Wilson has been elected not because Dudley admires his political views.... but because a great number of exceedingly ignorant people have been successfully induced to believe that his return will lead to the cheapening of bread and meat".(131)

An alternative view was put forward in The Times editorial on polling day, which pointed out that Dudley was "purely industrial and urban and has presented a fertile field for Labour propaganda. It is

surrounded by Labour constituencies and is not susceptible to the Unionist influences of Birmingham". It went on to point out that "unemployment is a much more potent factor in the Dudley election than the beef question. The town has three or four thousand unemployed, who throng the streets all day long and obviously do not intend to vote for the Coalition. If the Labour Party win Dudley they will do so on the backs of the unemployed".(132) Wilson, himself, when interviewed by the Birmingham Gazette, claimed that his victory was due to resentment at the Government's "failure to deal with the vital problems confronting the country – unemployment, high prices etc.". (133) Morgan wrote in his account of the period:- "The campaign by the Express (Beaverbrook) to end the embargo on Canadian cattle was blamed for the defeat of Griffith Boscawen.... even though Dudley was largely industrial and cared little for Canadian or imperial interests".(134) It seems likely, however, that the cattle issue helped Wilson secure the Liberal vote. Certainly the Netherton Liberal Association came round to supporting him on Free Trade grounds.(135)

Another factor is that Boscawen misjudged the mood of the electorate in 1921, having won in 1918 by making good use of the 'Hang the Kaiser' slogan. He now talked of making "Germany pay to the last farthing", whilst "Labour would let Germany off". As J.H.Thomas said, the electors "having been fooled with the 'Hang the Kaiser' cry are not likely to be taken in by its present equivalent".(136) Indeed Labour claimed that the policy of vengeance on Germany was leading to the dislocation of trade and unemployment. Clynes, the Labour leader, claimed that the Party "would make Germany pay for the wrong she did within the measure of the means".(137)

With unemployment in Dudley at 3,694 on the 18 March it seems obvious that this was a major factor in determining the election result.(138) Boscawen did recognise this, but put the blame on Labour and the trade unions. He pointed out that 27 million working days had been lost in strikes during 1920. The unions were also blamed for refusing to train ex-servicemen for the building trade.(139) Furthermore to assist his election chances the Government raised unemployment benefit to £1 a week a few days before the vote. Labour dismissed this as worth only 7 shillings in pre war purchasing power and called for a rate of £2 a week.(140) Labour also appealed to the unemployed calling for "work or maintenance" and condemning "the expenditure of millions on military adventures abroad".(141)

Wilson, himself, claimed that his victory was due to resentment over the Government's failure "to deal with the vital problems confronting the country – unemployment and high prices".(142) The Town



Crier declared that, “hopelessly beaten in the industrial field the workers are now turning to politics for salvation”.(143) The Conservative press, however, saw things differently with the Birmingham Post headlining the result as “Dudley’s Ingratitude”. Their editorial claimed that “Mr Wilson has been elected not because Dudley admires his political views (which seem to be extremely nebulous) but because a great number of exceedingly ignorant people have been successfully induced to believe that his return will lead to the cheapening of bread and meat”.(144)

### C. THE MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS 1921

1921 proved to be the high water mark for Labour’s performance during this parliament. High unemployment along with agitation over benefits seemed to anger the electorate. In April, for instance, the Wolverhampton Express and Star pointed out that Labour had secured a majority in Sedgley on the Urban District Council.(145) As the election was held during the miners’ strike, the result was perhaps not unexpected.

In the November municipal elections Labour contested all six seats on Smethwick Council, winning four, including Uplands for the first time. Yet the opposition, again fighting under a Coalition banner, captured Spon Lane with a working-class candidate, backed by the Conservatives. He claimed to be a trade union official, who blamed unemployment on the Labour Party for encouraging strikes.(146) Nevertheless successes in Smethwick led to the first appointment here of a Labour Lord Mayor in Alderman Willetts.(147)

Labour’s best performance came in Wolverhampton, where three gains were made. One of those elected was Emma Sproson, who was a member of the ILP and was to be the town’s first female councillor. She has been described as Wolverhampton’s “leading Suffragette and War Resister”.(148) After the election she unfolded a red flag on the Town Hall balcony.(149) Nicknamed ‘Red Emma’, she and her husband Frank were to be leading figures on the left in Wolverhampton during the 1920’s.

Elsewhere in the Black Country Labour’s performance was rather disappointing. In West Bromwich, where the party was defending four seats, two were lost to an Independent and a Liberal. This setback came despite the support given by local MP, Frank Roberts. The result may have been affected by a strike of local unemployed workers on relief schemes run by the Council. They had had their wages cut by 2d an hour in order to comply with the terms of a government grant.(150)

In Wednesbury, Labour made no new advances, retaining the Town Hall seat, but failing to win in either Kings Hall or Wood Green, where they had succeeded before. These elections were keenly contested with a 75-80% turn out.(151) The Conservative argument, which seemed to prevail, was put in the local press:- "Social reforms are very desirable.... but not in times like the present, when there is unemployment everywhere and large numbers of workers are on short time".(152)

Labour made two gains in Dudley, but, since these were the only seats that they won, it could be argued that they did not build on their by-election success. In Stourbridge the Party lost one seat and failed to win any. Labour fought only a limited campaign in Walsall, retaining their two seats. Results here were affected by the intervention of Anti-Waste candidates. Nevertheless an Unemployed Association's candidate won a surprise victory in Birchills Ward.(153)

On the whole Labour's performance in the region in 1921 seemed quite promising. Yet the impact of unemployment certainly hit the party's finances, whilst not always benefiting its electoral prospects, as the threat of job losses could make some voters more cautious. This was especially the case, when opposition election manifestos were linking the Labour Party with Communism and Bolshevism.(154)

#### D. THE WOLVERHAMPTON WEST BY-ELECTION, 1922

In these circumstances a by-election was held in Wolverhampton West on the 7 March 1922, following the death of Alfred Bird, the Coalition Conservative candidate. Labour was expected to do well, as the Government had been defeated in four consecutive by-elections. In fact during February they had made two gains from Coalition Conservatives with swings of around 20 per cent.(155) Then on the eve of the by-election Labour gained two seats on Staffordshire County Council.(156) Instead of victory, however, there was to be a swing of only 1.9 per cent against the Coalition candidate and Labour lost.(157)

The result, which came at the same time as Labour suffered a setback in the London County Council elections, marked a turning point for the party in its opposition to the Coalition. After Wolverhampton Labour made two further gains in the life of this Parliament, but these were from Coalition Liberals rather than Conservatives. Since the latter were then to win a large majority in the General Election of 1922, it appears that the Wolverhampton result was something of a turning point.

Bird was replaced by his son, Sir Robert, who had taken over the family business. The Labour candidate was again Alexander Walkden, whose links with the town went back ten years and had stood



in 1918. According to the Birmingham Post he was a moderate, who was able to “keep in the background the more extreme policies with which Labour.... has now become associated”.(158) Also in a constituency, where there were 3,0000 railwaymen, Walkden’s own position as General Secretary of the Railway Clerks’ Association was thought to be a big advantage.(159)

In his Address to the Electors Walkden stressed his close ties to the national leadership, who were supplying him with speakers at meetings. He condemned the Coalition Government for failing to provide work and decent housing. A special appeal was made for the Irish vote by condemning the ‘Black and Tan’ campaign for wasting lives and money. He also actively sought votes from women electors, by organising special meetings with them to discuss the issues. The Address contained nine proposals, which particularly stressed the provision of work, building new houses and reducing the cost of living. (160)

The position of the Liberals was important as they had no candidate standing and were working with the Conservatives in municipal elections. However, the respected Liberal MP for Wolverhampton East, George Thorne, backed Walkden. In a letter to the Labour candidate, Thorne justified his support on the grounds that they both wanted “the speedy dismissal from power of the present Coalition Government”. He also admitted that although from different parties, “there is very little between us as regards our views in relation to possible and practicable policies in the immediate future”.(161)

This assistance, however, was seen as double-edged. It was suggested that Thorne’s support for Walkden came because he did not want to stand against a Labour candidate in a future election in his own constituency.(162) Furthermore not all Liberals were prepared to back Walkden. Bird was supported by amongst others, Alderman Bantock, who had arranged the local deal with the Conservatives.(163) Alderman Dickinson, Chairman of the East Wolverhampton Liberal Association, claimed he had voted for Walkden at the last General Election, “but having regard to the present attitude of Labour in East Wolverhampton to Mr Thorne, he feels he cannot continue his support for the Labour candidate in West Wolverhampton”.(164)

The main issue in the by-election was the economic recession, which Wolverhampton had not avoided.(165) Walkden sought to use this to show how Lloyd George had failed to keep to the programme he had laid down in Wolverhampton in 1918. Unemployment in the town at the time stood at around 13,000, which was about 28 per cent of the workforce.(166) Walkden should have been further helped by the government’s recent cut in unemployment benefit and increased insurance



contributions, which were resented by employed and unemployed alike.(167) He called for “useful work or adequate maintenance for the unemployed as a national responsibility not out of the rates”.(168) The opposition, however, accused Labour of being “barren of helpful suggestions” and not knowing “how to set the industrial machine to work”.(169) Significantly there was a drop in unemployment in the weeks before the election, with a fall of over 150 in Wolverhampton in one week. Indeed unemployment fell by over 10,000 between January and February in the West Midlands as a whole.(170)

At first it appeared that Labour was winning the campaign. The Times, for instance, reported that “another Coalition defeat seems to be indicated”. Bird was considered to have had “little experience of public life”, whilst meetings arranged in his support had to be cancelled. Walkden, meanwhile, had arranged five with speakers including Thomas, Henderson and Frank Hodges, the secretary of the Miners’ Federation.(171) It was admitted, however that Bird was likely to secure most of the women’s vote as well as that of the licensed trade, which he claimed was threatened with prohibition by Labour.(172)

Indeed a significant factor behind Walkden’s defeat was the nature of the opposition. Bird was a populist Conservative, who was considered a “model employer” especially as he had “kept his works going almost at full time during the slump”.(173) His father had been a popular constituency MP, which was to prove a big asset. The Birmingham Gazette commented that “as the son of a well liked and trusted father, he started with an advantage, which was heightened by the sympathy felt towards him in the sudden and tragic manner of his bereavement”.(174) Moreover with its significant middle and lower-middle-class residential areas, Bird had a strong base to work from in the constituency.

Although Bird stood as a Coalition Unionist, “pledging himself as a supporter of the Government”, he announced his freedom “to vote as may seem to him wisest in regard to the urgent and pressing need to reduce national expenditure and on questions of national well being”.(175) More specifically he pledged that he would not vote against the repeal of the Parliament Act or any proposal to allow the Lords to veto money bills. He was not in favour of the Geddes Axe regarding education and he favoured equality of divorce for men and women.(176) Bird was also notoriously scurrilous in his attacks on his opponents. In this election, for instance, Walkden had to face probes into his salary and expenses as a union official. A leaflet was distributed listing the increase in members’ contributions between 1918-1920, along with the increase in management costs and the reduction in benefits.(177)



Bird also received the wholehearted support of the Wolverhampton Express and Star. In an editorial the paper claimed that "Socialists and extremists have got into the saddle" and have captured the trade unions. Labour "has failed to offer anything that can be called either practical or constructive, politically or industrially. All its ideas and hopes are based on schemes for which the taxpayer would have to foot further heavy bills".(178)

On his defeat Walkden put much emphasis on the "working class being scared with preposterous tales about Bolsheviks and the likelihood of their savings in saving certificates being jeopardised in the event of my election".(179) The Birmingham Post editorial commented that "Walkden was old hand enough to play the moderation card", but that although he was "an able man and a reasonable man, he was still unable to convince West Wolverhampton that he was a safe man". Typically Bird put his victory down to the electors preferring "constitutional government to unconstitutional methods and revolution".(180) The Birmingham Mail eulogised on Bird's victory:- "He stood for peaceful orderly progress in opposition to strife and class war, for security against spoliation, for the good of all sections instead of privilege for one at the expense of the rest, in a word for Unionism".(181)

The Labour Party described the result as "disappointing", but agreed that Walkden had put up "a splendid fight", increasing his vote by 3,641. They also accepted that the opposition had "mobilised their resources and fought desperately".(182) The Birmingham Gazette put Labour's defeat down to their failure to win the Liberal vote, due to their manoeuvres against Thorne in the East Division.(183) There was no doubt, however, that Bird was the kind of populist Conservative, who could win support amongst the Wolverhampton working class by stressing the economic risks in voting Labour. His campaign set a pattern for future contests in the region during this period.

#### E. THE 1922 MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS

These elections, which were held two weeks before the General Election, proved something of a setback for Labour in the Black Country as elsewhere.(184) Labour had its biggest defeat in Wednesbury, where the Conservatives captured the three contested seats. The local paper called the result "a great day in the history of Wednesbury", seeing it as a favourable sign for the forthcoming General Election. The paper warned that if Labour were able to implement its Manifesto "it would not be long before there would be not merely universal distress but starvation and famine".(185)



In West Bromwich Labour contested just the Lyng seat, which they held. There had been some hope that Labour might gain control of Smethwick. All six seats were contested but there were to be no changes with Labour retaining three of them.(186) The Birmingham Post was able to write of Smethwick, that “the seeds of Socialism so lavishly sown in the last few years are not bearing all the fruit that was expected”.(187) The main issue here for Labour was the size of the new council rents with the Party demanding economic rents only when workers got economic wages, with any losses made up by ratepayers.(188) Elsewhere the situation was even worse for Labour with the Party losing two seats in each of Dudley, Stourbridge and Walsall. Indeed they won no seats in the latter and only one in each of the other boroughs.

As for the reasons for these setbacks, which came on the eve of a General Election, the Birmingham Gazette blamed Labour’s national plans for a capital levy. This was seen “not as a substitute for existing taxation but as an addition”.(189) The Wolverhampton Express and Star agreed, warning of “dangerous and extreme elements” and pointing out that “the publication of the programme of the Labour Party has finally opened the eyes of the public”.(190) The Birmingham Mail believed it was the example of the “chaos, misery, starvation” of Bolshevik Russia. “A good many of the socialistic doctrines, which inspire our own Labour Party are identical with those of the Bolsheviks and they would lead to social and economic disaster here”. More significantly the Birmingham Mail pointed to the absence of three-cornered contests with “men and women of all parties” supporting “the anti Socialist regardless of his political colour”.(191) Indeed anti-Socialist pacts, such as the Ratepayers’ Coalition in Walsall, were in operation with some effectiveness.(192)

Labour was facing a much stronger attack in these municipal elections. Scare tactics were being used by a generally unfriendly press to distort Labour’s policies and frighten voters.(193) The results were a setback for Labour, although it could have been worse. Yet the Party was not making the progress in municipal elections that their success in the 1918 General Election might suggest. This reflects the fact that few of the local Labour parties had expanded their membership much above the minimum, whilst the recession had severely hit finances as union affiliation dropped.(194) The Party was also faced with tough opposition, which understood the electorate and was not afraid of adapting its social policies on matters like housing to meet their needs. The more restricted nature of the franchise in municipal elections is another important consideration.



## F. THE 1922 GENERAL ELECTION

In the 1922 General Election, which took place on the 16 November, two weeks after the municipal ones, Labour retained its four original seats but lost Dudley. In three of the four seats the Labour majorities were reduced. Thus as far as the Black Country was concerned it seems that the Labour Party had held its own without making any significant electoral progress since 1918.

The main issue in the election throughout the region was unemployment, although there had been some recovery in the local economy during 1922. Labour's proposal for a capital levy on business was controversial since the Conservatives claimed it would make the recession worse. In turn many Labour candidates sought to downplay the levy, realising it would make them vulnerable to Conservative attacks.

### 1. SMETHWICK

The Conservatives had high hopes of regaining Smethwick, where their defeat in 1918 was blamed on the dropping of the popular candidate Major Thompson for Christabel Pankhurst. The borough was suffering, however, from high unemployment with 25% or 9,000 of the working population out of work.(195) Moreover 1 in 9 of these, having exhausted their benefits, were dependent on the Poor Law Guardians. The local Unemployment Committee was very active in pressing the Town Council for more relief work schemes.(196)

The Labour candidate and MP, John Davison, had worked hard in Parliament on behalf of his constituents. In an impressive maiden speech, for instance, he launched an attack on "the folly of successive Governments in this country in restricting their output of housing accommodation". He enlarged on this by describing conditions in which "one living room less than 11 feet square (was) occupied by a mother, father and six children" and "twenty back-to-back houses of from one to three rooms each, sheltering 136 people with one common yard and lavatory accommodation composed of four foul privies".(197)

Nevertheless Davison was described by the Birmingham Post as standing by "with more frankness than some of his compatriots under the red flag", standing by the "full Labour programme of reconstruction", calling for the "State ownership of land, mines, railways, canals and shipping.... Pensions for mothers and the abolition of the Poor Law".(198) Davison also called for "the equitable distribution of the proceeds of industry.... not Bolshevism or Communism but common sense and

justice". He also advocated a reduction in working hours, the raising of the school leaving age and a large programme of public works, including housing, transport and schools. To pay for it there would be a supertax on large incomes and increased death duties. He was prepared to support the capital levy but, when pressed, replied cautiously that "he did not think the Labour Party would attempt to do it if returned to power tomorrow. They would have to examine the whole question".(199)

As Major Thompson decided not to stand, the Conservatives chose Major Simcox, the Lord of the Manor of Harborne, to replace him. Simcox had spent nearly 30 years in the Indian Civil Service and Defence Force, but was also able to claim local roots.(200) He quickly sought to equate the Labour Party as closely as possible with the Communists, claiming that "they have toned things down and smoothed things out.... but they meant the same as Lenin and Trotsky".(201) The Conservatives hoped to win support from Liberals by emphasising Labour extremism. Indeed it was reported that many Liberals, led by Alderman Pinkney, had agreed to back Simcox.(202) In truth, however, the Liberal Party in Smethwick was in serious decay, being described by Cook as "totally unorganised until 1925".(203)

Davison won but his majority was reduced. The reason for the reduction, according to the Town Crier, was "the money poured out by the Unionists in Smethwick, the scurrilous posters, the misrepresentation of Labour's case and the fleet of motor cars on polling day".(204) One example of these tactics was the intervention of the managing director of Guest, Keen and Nettleford, who addressed his workers on "the horrible stories of Bolshevik misrule in Russia".(205)

## 2. WEST BROMWICH

Unemployment was also the big issue in West Bromwich for this election.(206) During 1921 there were marches and demonstrations by the unemployed in support of outdoor relief.(207) The local Labour Party was active in supporting them as well as the striking miners. Labour officials, such as the party agent, Guest, addressed public meetings.(208)

The local MP, Frank Roberts, was a strong candidate. The Birmingham Gazette called him "a good speaker and moderate in his views"(209) An election poster stressed "his honesty of purpose" and his work for "countless good causes" such as hospitals, lifeboats, education and workers' recreation. He had served on several important committees over the previous four years. Roberts also made a special appeal to women voters, warning of rent rises when the Rent Restriction Act expired in 1923 and



listing price increases since 1914. No mention was made of the capital levy, although he stressed the need for “taxation according to the ability to pay”. The poster emphasised that he had “a sympathetic understanding of the true needs of the industrial classes. He is of the workers; he lives with the workers. In all his public life he has voiced the workers needs and ideals”.(210)

The Conservatives, however, thought they had good prospects of success, believing that their failure in 1918 was due to the ill health of their candidate, Lord Lewisham. Their initial candidate, Charles Petrie, who, according to the local press, “had worked hard for the cause.... and had made himself very popular”, was forced to retire at the last minute due to ill health”.(211) His replacement, Herbert Parkes, was a director of the local Atlas Iron Works, a member of the Midland Iron and Steel Wages Board and chairman of the Birmingham Chamber of Commerce. It was claimed that he was “on the best of terms with his workers” and approved of trade unionism, “when kept within its proper sphere free from the dictation of extremists”.(212)

Parkes appealed for ‘Peace, Retrenchment and Reform’, calling for “a cessation of those industrial disputes, which had hampered trade so long; they must get down to work and work as hard as they could”. He wanted to extend industrial conciliation, which he claimed worked well in the iron trade with the Midland Wages Board.(213) There were, however, claims which he was forced to deny that a worker at the Atlas Ironworks was dismissed for displaying a photograph of the Labour candidate. There were also stories that he would close the Atlas Ironworks, if he were not elected.(214)

This time West Bromwich had a Liberal candidate, A.E.Glyn Edwards, who was a barrister from London. He was supported by Dr. Hazel, the town’s most prominent Liberal, who had backed Labour in 1918.(215) Their success in capturing a seat from Labour in the 1921 local elections probably encouraged the Liberals to stand. Their plan of campaign was to attack the Conservatives over Tariff Reform and Labour over the capital levy.(216)

In his election programme Roberts called for the doubling of old age pensions and a lowering of the qualifying age. For the unemployed he promised “the provision of useful work” and “adequate maintenance, where work cannot be found”. He also called for a return of the Penny Post, the abolition of indirect taxation, the clearing away of slums and the provision of healthy homes at reasonable rents. The Birmingham Post accused him of promising “all sorts of good things to the workers without regard to how the money for them is to be found”.(217) The West Bromwich Free Press described the Labour



programme as one of “plunder and confiscation”, likely to bring about a situation similar to that in Russia.(218)

The result, however, was a victory for Roberts with an increased majority. He certainly benefited, as the Free Press accepted, from having had four years in possession, whilst Parkes had only been candidate for a short time.(219) Roberts had also been determined to secure the women’s vote, inviting Margaret Bondfield to the town, where she addressed a large meeting.(220) The intervention of the Liberals was also significant. Roberts was the only one of the Black Country Labour MPs to increase his majority, which suggests that locally the Liberal vote had been more inclined to the Conservatives than to Labour.

### 3. WEDNESBURY

Wednesbury was a third Labour seat, which the Conservatives were optimistic about capturing. In 1918 the contest had been a three-cornered fight, but now it would be a straight fight with Labour. Moreover Labour had performed wretchedly here in the November municipal elections with the Conservatives capturing the three contested seats, including that held by the local party agent. The parliamentary constituency, however, was much larger than the municipal one, covering Darlaston and Tipton as well as Wednesbury. Labour was particularly strong in Tipton, where, according to Barnsby, it had developed with close links to the Methodist Church.(221) Both Wednesbury and Tipton had high unemployment rates, as they were badly affected by the depression in the coal and iron industries.(222)

The Conservatives in Wednesbury believed that the unemployment situation would not hinder their chances. The Birmingham Post, in its survey of the seat, claimed that “the workers confidently subscribe to the view that trade is never as good as when a Conservative Government is in office”. Their candidate was Hubert Williams, who was the assistant secretary of an employer’s federation and was seen as an authority on currency and finance, having worked as a government statistician during the war. He blamed the recession on “high taxation, the condition of Europe and Socialist agitation”. His solution was to support “the safeguarding of our heavy industries and the development of mutual preferences within the Empire”.(223)

Williams attacked Labour’s plan for a capital levy, claiming that it was “not going to touch the problems of the National Debt. It simply means a redistribution of the country’s wealth. The scheme would cause such a panic that countless millions would be thrown out of employment”.(224) Williams



was also prepared to link the Labour Party with Russia saying that “they would like to tax the capitalist out of existence in order that a few Mr Lenins and Mr Trotskys might enjoy that which they could give them”.(225) The local Wednesbury press took this up, pointing out that in Russia “war on private enterprise has resulted in a devastated land and a starving people”.(226)

Short, the Labour MP, realised that he had a persuasive opponent. He sought to counter Williams’s call for more Protection, by claiming that the Labour programme offered a better future with full employment and social justice. He also stressed the moderation of the Labour movement, saying in a speech at Darlaston that “if it had not been for the sound common sense of the trade union leaders of this country, there might easily have been a revolution, because of the poverty, destitution and misery those people had forced upon the masses of this country”. Short emphasised the need to settle the peace treaties along with reparations and war debts, in order to restore trade. He stood for “the abolition of unemployment, a fair standard of living, decent houses with the abolition of slumdom and sound sanitary conditions”. He claimed that “the horses of the police were better housed than some of the people in Wednesbury”.(227)

The Tipton Herald claimed that Short’s meetings had more “shouting exuberance” and bigger crowds than those of Williams. “There is no room at Burnt Tree to accommodate all who wish to hear Short,” wrote its reporter.(228) He was helped further by some costly mistakes, which Williams made. In the first place he was accused of talking contemptuously of ‘common soldiers’, although he later claimed that he meant ‘competent soldiers’.(229) Then at a public meeting at Dudley Port he appeared to endorse the recent 10 shillings reduction in engineers’ wages, when he said that “masters and men should make absolutely necessary sacrifices”.(230)

These could have been vital lapses as Short won by only 105 votes. The result was not what the municipal elections had indicated, but it should be remembered that the franchise was larger for parliamentary elections. Williams’s support for Safeguarding and Imperial Preference seems to have attracted some working-class support in a constituency hit by recession. Certainly Liberal supporters, in the absence of a candidate, appear to have voted for the Conservatives. Nevertheless Short had built up his popularity locally over four years. “Labour support for what Labour has gained” was how the Tipton Herald put it.(231)



#### 4. KINGSWINFORD

The fourth Labour MP defending his seat in 1922, was Charlie Sitch in Kingswinford. This time he was opposed in a straight fight by Gilbert Beyfus, who had secured the backing of the Kingswinford Conservatives to stand as a Coalition Liberal after giving “certain assurances”.(232) Before the war he had nursed the Dudley Parliamentary seat, part of which was now in Kingswinford. He announced that it was a time when “moderate men should join together to support any moderate Government”.(233)

Sitch had the advantage of being an important local figure, who as a union official was aware of the problems in the constituency. It was described as “an electorate of ironworkers, chainmakers, glassworkers, brickmakers and a fair sprinkling of miners”.(234) With many of these industries in deep recession, unemployment was prevalent throughout the constituency. Mining had been particularly badly affected by the 1921 dispute, which was followed by the closure of many pits due to flooding problems. Meanwhile the domestic chain making industry in Cradley Heath was beginning a terminal decline, bringing the high unemployment figures, which peaked at 10,170 on 17 June 1921.(235)

Beyfus could make a strong claim for the ex-servicemen’s vote as, in addition to being wounded and captured during the war, he was “mentioned in dispatches for gallantry and persistence in attempting to escape”.(236) He attacked nationalisation and the capital levy, warning that “half the wealth of the country would be taken and industry would be crippled, for capital was the most essential part”. He also directed attacks on Sitch’s position as a trade union official, blaming strikes not on the rank and file but on some trade union leaders, who had taken political action.(237)

Sitch was prepared to support a capital levy, explaining that it was a means whereby those who made money out of the war “will pay off most of the war debt”.(238) He was, however, forced to deny claims in a poster that Labour wanted to reduce interest on war savings’ certificates and loans.(239) He also championed the cause of ex-servicemen and the disabled. Sitch denied being an extremist or that he had ever preached class war, urging that he had always worked for fairness from both sides.(240) He did make an issue out of his opposition to sweated labour, pointing out how Lloyd George had turned down the chance of reform, owing to his position in the Coalition.(241)

Sitch’s majority in 1922 was down by 2,000 on his 1918 victory. Much of this can be attributed to the fact that whereas in 1918 he had been involved in a three-cornered contest, this time he was in a straight fight. In fact Sitch’s performance was quite creditable, since in 1918 he had won with only a minority of the vote. The key factor for Sitch was the popularity he had secured locally through his



work in the trade union movement.(242) The number of individual members in his constituency party remained at the minimum throughout this period.(243)

## 5. DUDLEY

Labour was also defending a fifth seat at Dudley, following their by-election success. This time, however, the Party would not be able to concentrate its organisation on the seat, leaving much to local resources. The Birmingham Post, however, pointed out that the Labour organisation had been “considerably strengthened” and that Wilson was “confident of victory”.(244)

The Conservatives chose a strong candidate in C.E.Lloyd, director of N.Hingley ironworks in Netherton and vice president of the National Federation of Iron and Steel Manufacturers. Lloyd accepted that Dudley was “among the biggest sufferers in the economic troubles of the time” with its major industries, glass, iron and coal, deep in depression. He attacked the sectional interest of Wilson, the union official, claiming that the reestablishment and extension of trade needed “the united will for peace of all people in the State”.(245) It was noted in his favour that “he kept the iron industry moving in the district where others closed”.(246) The Conservatives were confident of success, blaming their defeat in 1921 on “a flood of misrepresentations”, especially “the dear food bogey”.(247)

Lloyd followed standard Conservative policy by attacking the capital levy as likely to bring further unemployment.(248) As with other local Conservative candidates he attacked his opponent’s union costs. In the case of Wilson’s union he claimed that its management expenses represented 47shillings out of every 100 shillings spent. He also reminded the electorate of Wilson’s pledges at the time of the by-election, which he had not been able to fulfil, although the fact that Labour was not in government was not pointed out.(249) In fact Lloyd proved to be such a popular candidate that he won the support of many moderate Liberals and trade unionists, “some of whom signed a nomination paper on his behalf”.(250)

Wilson avoided any mention of the capital levy in his election address. When pressed on the subject, he said:- “We are not wedded to this policy. We fully appreciate that our country is in a difficulty. We believe this will be a way out”. He then challenged his opponents to propose other ways of reducing the National Debt.(251) He did announce that he favoured “the readjustment of taxation that will fit the burden to the capacity of the individual to bear it”. He also supported “the adequate provision of houses

in co-operation with local authorities; the removal of the income limit disqualification from the Old Age Pensions Act and the granting of pensions to widows”.(252)

Wilson’s apparent moderation could not save Labour from defeat, as the Conservatives gained a majority of over 4,000, which was their largest in the Black Country in this election. The Conservatives certainly benefited from having a strong local candidate, who could be described as an ideal Unionist, able to appeal to all classes in the constituency, helped the Conservatives. They also had the absolute support of the local press, which claimed that “the demands of Labour and socialistic influences are not agreeable to the sturdy and independent folk of Great Britain”.(253)

In fact Labour was to lose 11 of their 14 by-election gains of the previous Parliament in this General Election. The Annual Report put this down to the party not being able to concentrate its organisation in the General Election. “Local parties were left to their own resources and in some cases the organisation had not been effectively maintained”.(254) This was probably the case in Dudley, where the local party seemed to be in a fragile state at this time, having failed to build up an effective local organisation. The Annual Report, for instance, gave Dudley’s individual affiliation fees for 1922 at the minimum of £1/10.(255).

## 6. WOLVERHAMPTON WEST

Labour still had high hopes of success in Wolverhampton West, despite their earlier by-election defeat. Unemployment, which had been as high as 28 per cent in May 1921, was still at 17% in January 1923.(256) This was despite the fact that the town had a broad industrial base, which included new industries such as motor cars, motor cycles, bicycles and electrical appliances.(257)

Walkden was again the Labour candidate. This time he quickly made his position clear on a number of points, in order to check the expected attacks and innuendoes from Bird. He assured the electorate that he was connected only with the Railway Clerks Association, “which will provide every farthing which will be spent by Labour in the contest.... freely contributed by railway clerks and stationmasters”. If returned, he assured the electors, “he would be liberated from his ordinary trade union work and would be free to devote all his time to their interests in parliament”.(258)

In his Election Address Walkden stressed his moderation, stating that he stood for constitutional progress through the House of Commons and denouncing “the abominable suggestion made during the last by-election that he was connected with an unconstitutional party governed by extremists”. He



wrote of getting the National Debt paid off quickly “by more graduated taxation of large incomes and big fortunes” and added that Labour “absolutely refuses to approve any policy of repudiation”. Walkden also put much emphasis on the need for slum clearance and a house building programme. Wolverhampton, he claimed, had nearly 3,000 houses in need of demolition, while nearly a thousand families had applied to the Town Hall for a home. On unemployment he stated that his party would provide “work or maintenance”, promising “a large programme of necessary and useful public works”(259)

Walkden supported the capital levy, claiming that it was “a matter that does not concern the manual working class but the people that have money”.(260) The Birmingham Post pointed out that Walkden, having failed to convince the electors that he was a safe man in the by-election, was now less likely to do so with an attack on private capital.(261) Later in the campaign, however, Walkden was able to quote Arthur Chamberlain, brother of Austen, who said:- “In my opinion a levy on capital now would be sound economically”.(262)

Bird fought a similar campaign to that of the by-election, putting much emphasis on smears and innuendoes. In particular he was anxious to link his opponent with Russia, talking of “Communist” Sunday Schools. He again attacked the management expenses of Walkden’s Railway Clerks Union, whose membership, he claimed, was falling.(263) Walkden was provoked into issuing a writ against Bird, claiming that the reason for the fall in his union’s membership was the number of girls leaving after the end of the war.(264)

Both parties were hoping to secure the Liberal vote, but the latter appears to have given no lead in this ward.(265) Walkden promoted his own Free Trade views, whilst Bird denied any leanings towards Protection.(266) Walkden, however, received a glowing testimonial from George Thorne, the Liberal MP for the East division, who called him “a most honest and honourable man”. This was over his stand on the licensed trade (267) Walkden probably had more success in attacking Bird’s voting record over work schemes and unemployment pay.(268) Bird admitted that unemployment was the most important problem, saying that the only cure was “a revival of trade”. He did, however, promise to defend the level of ex-service pensions and the old age pension.(269)

Bird was re-elected, although his majority was nearly 500 down on his by-election success. This was a constituency situated on the edge of the industrial belt with a significant middle class element. It seems that Bird was well suited to exploit their economic fears over trade unions, taxation and

government spending. This probably helped him to secure much of the Liberal vote, which tended towards the Conservatives anyway, as the local election pact shows. Meanwhile individual membership of the local Labour Party slumped to the minimum return of £1/10 for 1921 and £1/13/4 for 1922, despite the earlier efforts to secure an increase.(270)

## 7. WOLVERHAMPTON EAST

Wolverhampton East was a more typical Black Country seat in that it was predominantly industrial and working class. Moreover it had its deep-rooted Liberal tradition, which dated back to the 1832 Reform Act. Rather surprisingly, this tradition was to be maintained throughout the inter-war years, despite the collapse of the Liberal vote elsewhere. For this election, however, the parliamentary arrangement, which the Liberals had had with Labour in 1918, had broken down. Labour decided early in 1922 to contest the East division, appointing as their candidate W.T.A.Foot, a London railwayman and member of the NUR. However, since the party had only recently been established in this division, their organisation and finances were weak.(271)

The Liberals, on the other hand, remained strong here for a number of reasons. One factor was the personality of the local MP, George Thorne, who had been the member for 14 years. At the heart of the constituency was the lock industry of Willenhall. Before the war Thorne had been responsible for helping to reorganise the Lockmakers Union. A Wages Board was set up and a post war 47-hour week secured. During the 1921 recession the union was to work with the employers in an example of co-operation rather than conflict. With wages linked to prices employers agreed to hold their prices, whilst the union would boycott those employers selling below the price list. This was possible because there was a regular demand for the product and it was confined to the town of Willenhall.(272) This example of class collaboration helps explain the strength of Liberalism in the constituency.

The basis for much of Thorne's support came from the Nonconformist vote in a constituency, where the chapel was still a significant factor. Roman Catholics also backed him, owing to his consistent support for Irish Home Rule. He stated that he wanted "Irishmen to have the chance to work out their own salvation".(273) His connections with Nonconformity in turn led to links with the temperance movement. Thorne, himself, made his own position clear in a letter, in which he opposed prohibition but backed "a local option" on the matter. He praised Walkden for following the line of the Labour



Manifesto, unlike Foot, who had secured the backing of the licensed trade. This situation persuaded some Labour supporters, such as Councillor George Evans to back Thorne.(274)

The Liberals had another advantage in this division. Owing to their local pact with the Conservatives, there were no three cornered contests in local elections. It meant that the Liberals could concentrate their efforts in the Eastern wards, whilst the Conservatives had the Western ones. However, without any local elections to contest, the Conservatives remained poorly organised in the East. The Conservatives appointed as their candidate, Pinson, who was a local lock manufacturer and Chairman of Willenhall Council. He was considered “a just and generous employer”, but lacked Bird’s aggressive attacks on Labour.(275) The election became a four way contest, when the Reverend Shaw stood again as a National Liberal with the backing of Lloyd George.

Labour’s decision to stand against Thorne was not popular even amongst some of their own supporters. There was much talk of apathy as the party’s greatest enemy.(276) Foot was anxious to emphasise the distance between Liberals and Labour. He stressed policies such as the nationalisation of the mines and railways as well as the need for a capital levy to cut the National Debt.(277) He also condemned both Liberals and Conservatives for not doing enough to improve housing conditions in Wolverhampton, which he described as “an absolute disgrace”.(278)

Even before the vote it became obvious that Foot was not going to threaten the Liberal’s position.(279) Shaw also found that this time he was getting less support, with reports of “sparse attendance” at some of his meetings.(280) Indeed, he even offered to stand down, if Thorne agreed to back Lloyd George, but this was something the MP was not prepared to do.(281) Thorne sought to appeal to the moderate working class, claiming that “there was a great deal of loose talk about revolution done to frighten people, but he had faith in the sobriety and sense of the workers of this country”.(282) He put emphasis on social reform, the League of Nations and Free Trade.(283)

In fact Thorne’s biggest challenge came from the Conservative, Pinson, who had the advantage of being a local candidate. His campaign, however, was less well organised and certainly overshadowed by that of Bird’s. In this constituency, with its respected Liberal MP, it was not possible to centre the campaign around “the threat of Socialism” as Bird succeeded in doing in the West division.(284) Thorne won with a majority of over 2,000 with Foot coming a poor third.

## 8. BILSTON

The Bilston seat had a Conservative majority of over 3,000 in 1918, although the result had been affected by the scandal concerning the Labour candidate. The victorious Brigadier General Hickman now stood down to be replaced by Lieutenant Colonel Howard Bury, who was the leader of a recent expedition to Mount Everest. The Labour candidate was John Baker, a Tynesider and the assistant secretary of the Iron and Steel Trades Confederation. Baker was judged “a moderate man”, who was expected to appeal to the ironworkers of Bilston and the miners of Gornal.(285)

Labour was quite optimistic, due to their success in the local elections at Coseley and Sedgley within the constituency. Unemployment, which had peaked at over 9,000 in May 1921, remained a serious problem.(286) Baker gave full support to the capital levy, seeing it as a way of reducing the National Debt and removing the taxes on food.(287) He attacked the class-based policies of the former Coalition Government, claiming that they had benefited the profiteer at the expense of the working class. He pointed out that real wages, which had peaked in 1918, had now fallen below the 1913 level.(288)

Howard Bury talked of the Government wanting “a spirit of friendship and good will between all classes”, whilst “the Socialists were preaching a class war”.(289) He attacked Labour’s nationalisation plans as a threat to employment as well as the capital levy, which he called “a disaster”.(290) With no Liberal standing the Conservatives needed to stress Labour extremism in order to secure their vote. This seemed successful, with one prominent Liberal, Major J.S.Thompson, brother of the Mayor of Wolverhampton, giving his support.(291) This seems to be another example of the post-war local Liberal establishment turning to the Conservatives out of fear of Labour. The result was that Howard Bury won a fairly comfortable victory with a majority of nearly 2,000. The Labour vote, however, increased by 50 per cent.

## 9. WALSALL

Walsall was another Black Country town to have been badly hit by the recession. Its traditional industries of saddlery, harnesses and leather goods, linked with the horse trade, were in long term decline, whilst iron, steel and tube manufacturing were affected by the general recession. Unemployment, which had reached 9,109 or around 20% of the workforce in June 1921 at the time of the coal dispute, still stood at 6,161 in October 1922.(292) The widespread unemployment in the town had brought some co-operation during 1921-22 between the local Trades Council and the Labour Party,



which had enabled pressure to be put on the Town Council to secure more assistance for the unemployed.(293) In 1918 the local Labour Party had shelved its tradition of disunity to unite behind the candidacy of Joseph Thickett. In 1922 no local Labour candidate was forthcoming, so R.Dennison was appointed by Party HQ. Dennison, the assistant secretary of the Iron and Steel Trades Confederation, was a moderate, who condemned Direct Action.(294)

Meanwhile Sir Richard Cooper, who had won the 1918 General Election with a majority of over 6,000, had fused his National Party with the Lloyd George Coalition. He decided to stand down for this Election, but his wife, Lady Cooper, was adopted by the local Conservatives in January 1922.(295) Walsall had retained a strong Liberal tradition, partly due to the survival of the town's small-scale manufactures. In the 1918 General Election many Liberals had supported Cooper, leaving their candidate in a poor third place. For this election the local party chose a popular personality, Pat Collins, who was a Walsall showman and President of the Showman's Guild. Collins political programme was described by the Birmingham Post as "broadly indistinguishable from that of the Unionist Party", in that he wanted "peace, retrenchment and reform".(296) He took no stand on the issue of the Liberal leadership. His popularity was said to rest on his appeal to the man in the street and the fact that he was a Walsall Liberal.(297)

The intervention of Collins was a blow to Labour. According to the Birmingham Mail "their hopes of success have sunk to zero".(298) They were particularly annoyed as back in June Collins had written a personal letter to the Labour candidate "expressing the hope that nothing would be done to split the progressive vote".(299) It appears that the deal fell through because it required Labour to withdraw from other constituencies, including Wolverhampton East, which they were not prepared to do.(300)

Collins won a surprise victory with Labour coming third. Lady Cooper may have suffered as a woman candidate, but more likely because she was seen as too much part of the establishment.(301) Dennison was disappointed, especially as he had stressed his moderation.(302) He denied that Collins victory marked a revival of Liberalism, claiming that "Walsall was essentially and fundamentally a Labour constituency".(303) Dennison put his defeat down not just to the personality of Collins, but also to "the jealousies, petty disputes and frictions of the local party leaders, which made for disunity".(304)

The result was such that Dennison's association thought it not worth his while fighting the seat again. The candidate also addressed some plain words to the local Labour leaders, saying that they should "show a great deal more charity to one another. There should be less jealousy and, if

personalities were sunk, it would be all to the good – the pettiness of some of the disputes had caused him pain and amazement”.(305) It is probable that the fact that Dennison was an outsider proved the biggest drawback for Labour in this election.

#### 10. STOURBRIDGE

The final Black Country constituency of Stourbridge was not contested by Labour in 1922. This appears surprising as the Party had come within 1,333 votes of capturing the seat in 1918. However, Mary MacArthur, the popular candidate of 1918, had died not long after that election. It was suggested that the Party could not afford the expense of the fight.(306). Labour’s Annual Report gave the division the minimum individual membership for 1921, contributing £1/10 a year, which was standard for the region.(307) For 1922, however, the constituency gave no return, suggesting that membership had slumped below even the minimum requirement.(308) Since Labour contested 414 out of the 657 seats nationally in this election, this was probably the case. The constituency was also badly affected by the recession, with unemployment reaching 5,000 in Oldbury and 8,000 in Stourbridge, which included Brierley Hill, in June 1921.(309)

The Liberal MP, J.W.Wilson, had held the seat for 27 years. The Birmingham Mail claimed that since 1918 there had been a revolt from “the colourless latitudinarian Liberalism of Mr Wilson”.(310) The immediate beneficiary was not Labour but the Conservative, D.P.Pielou, who won a surprise victory. His main policy was support for colonial preference and the safeguarding of home industries.(311) Moreover due to his war record and the work he had been doing for ex-servicemen, he was probably not an unattractive candidate amongst potential Labour voters.

#### F. CONCLUSIONS

Given their success in 1918 Labour’s performance in the Black Country in the 1922 General Election must be seen as slightly disappointing. The party retained its four MPs, but suffered a drop in their percentage of the vote in the three seats of Smethwick, Walsall and West Bromwich, although in the latter this was largely due to the intervention of the Liberals. Only in Bilston was there a significant increase in the Labour vote. Overall Labour increased its vote by 20 per cent to 104,796, but the party’s share of the total vote in contested seats fell from 42.8 per cent to 41.0 per cent. Nevertheless this was



still well above the national figure of 29.4 per cent and the Birmingham figure of 36 per cent in contested seats.(312)

The results reflected the steady rather than rapid expansion, which the local Labour parties had experienced between the General Elections. There was an increase in the number of local councillors across the region, although the total did not give a true reflection of the party's strength, which was partly due to the restricted nature of the local government franchise. Meanwhile individual party membership, as seen through the affiliation fees, remained low. Nevertheless organisation was not lacking with Drinkwater continuing to appear effective in his role within the Midlands. The number of full time agents in the region stood at six in 1920.(313)

A significant factor behind Labour's modest growth during this period was the 1921 recession, which affected the Black Country more seriously than other regions. In 1918 the General Election had been fought at a time of full employment and rising trade union membership. The appearance of high unemployment along with the fall in trade union membership must have affected the confidence of the working class and their organisations. Workers feared losing their jobs, whilst the decline in union membership meant exposure to aggressive policies from employers. It meant that workers were more likely to follow the established line. It also led to a decline in membership and finances for the Labour Party, which could explain why there was no Labour candidate in Stourbridge for the 1922 Election.

Another problem for Labour was that their proposals for dealing with the recession probably did not seem precise enough at the time. Even their schemes for public works appeared rather vague. On the other hand local Conservatives developed populist policies and candidates. This was very much a legacy of the Chamberlain years, when Tariff Reform had emerged as a policy to unite the classes. Local Conservatives realised that they could rival Labour for the working-class vote by make good use of issues such as Tariff Reform along with some modest social reforms. They argued that it was cheap imports and the loss of export markets that were hitting Black Country industries and jobs.

Another Conservative message, which was proving effective at the time, was to warn of the threat to the economy of Labour's proposals. In local elections their candidates pointed to rising household rates, whilst in the General Election it was the capital levy. In addition to this many Conservative candidates were prepared to fight scurrilous campaigns against Labour, hoping to arouse the fears of the electorate, particularly the potential Liberal voter. Successful Conservative candidates like Bird and Lloyd had strong local ties and populist policies. As industrialists within their constituencies they had a



sound understanding of the needs of their electorate. Local employers could identify with these candidates, which encouraged them to exert pressure on their workforces to conform. Labour seemed to be at a particular disadvantage when it appointed outsiders such as Dennison and Foot.

The decline of the Liberals should have helped Labour at this time. In those Black Country towns, where there was still a strong working-class Liberal vote, such as in Wolverhampton East, Walsall and Stourbridge, the Labour Party made least progress. On the other hand parts of the Black Country have been described as “the worst scene of Liberal decay”. In Smethwick and Wednesbury the Liberals had no organisation until 1925, whilst in West Bromwich they secured less than 10% of the vote in 1922.<sup>(314)</sup> Both Labour and the Conservatives sought to squeeze the Liberal vote with the former pressing their reform policies and speaking of working-class solidarity, whilst the latter stressed the threat of Socialism. In 1922 both sides could claim some success in this matter.

The local Labour parties were certainly helped by the work in Parliament of their four MPs. Historians have been dismissive of Labour’s intake in 1918, largely it seems on the grounds that they were mainly sponsored by the trade unions. Thorpe, for instance, describes the PLP of 1918 as “somewhat lacklustre”.<sup>(315)</sup> In fact the four Black Country Labour MPs all developed their reputations through their activities in Parliament, working hard on behalf of their constituents on issues such as working conditions, housing and unemployment.

By 1922 the Labour Party in the Black Country had secured its organisational structure and maintained its electoral position in the General Election. With their dependence on trade unions and small individual membership, local constituency parties resembled the picture portrayed by McKibbin. Yet with an economic slump and falling trade union membership the party’s organisation and finances were being stretched. This was a major factor behind both the decision not to contest Stourbridge and the failure to hold Dudley in the 1922 General Election. It also helps to explain the slight swing against the party across the region in this election, which contrasts unfavourably with the position nationally, where Labour nearly trebled the number of its MPs from 57 to 146. The figures for the Black Country show that despite the party’s expansion nationally, there were still limitations on Labour’s achievements at this time, as has been pointed out by McKibbin, Howard and Savage.



## FOOTNOTES

- 1 According to Cowling, Labour was affected in 1918 by the pacifist element in the party, Lloyd George's popularity, the National Democratic Party and the 4 Labour Coalition members.  
Cowling, M. The Impact of Labour (1971), p.24.
- 2 Morgan, K. Consensus and Disunity (1979), pp.213-4. Wrigley writes that "Lloyd George made Labour's constitutional challenge a major issue in his political manoeuvring of 1919 to 1922. At various times after the Armistice he and his supporters tried to smear Labour's moderate leaders by arguing guilt by association with Ramsay MacDonald, supporters of 'direct action' or – in the case of Henderson – absolutely falsely as one who had 'hob-knobbed' with Lenin and Trotsky when he had been in Russia". Wrigley, C. (1990), p.304.
- 3 "The outstanding areas of Labour strength were in areas of concentrated heavy industry, preferably of a one-industry kind as in mining or textile towns. Many of Labour's strongholds were in a sense, almost industrial villages, surviving from an earlier phase of industrialisation, isolated mining communities such as Clay Cross, Chester-le-Street, or Ebbw Vale, with their fierce class loyalties and a warm sense of communal and cultural association. Labour was based essentially on Clydeside, Durham, Lancashire, the West Riding, and South Wales. Morgan, K. (1979), p.223.
- 4 Ibid., p.222.
- 5 Cowling, M. (1971), p.30. Cowling adds that the party "had the advantage of an unsuccessful regime to attack".
- 6 Morgan, K. (1979), p.74. In 1919, for instance, 7.5 million days were lost by cotton operatives, 6.8 million by ironfounders and 3.85 million by railmen. Butler, D. and Butler, G. British Political Facts (1994 ed), p.371.
- 7 Thorpe, A. (1997), pp.51-52. The money raised from unions by the political levy rose from 2d per member pre year to 3d in 1920. McKibbin, R. (1974), p.157.
- 8 Durham, Glamorgan and Monmouthshire. Thorpe, A. (1997), p.53.
- 9 Morgan, K. (1979), p.47. Labour raised its total of London borough seats from 48 to 573.
- 10 Cook, C. 'Liberals, Labour and Local Elections' in The Politics of Reappraisal 1918-1939 Edited by G.Peele and C.Cook (1975), p.168.
- 11 Tanner, D. (1990), p.389. Tanner also compares the Labour vote in the 1922 municipal elections with those in the parliamentary election, which was held two weeks later. He found that in seats

where a comparison could be made the Labour vote was down from 47.66 per cent in the parliamentary election to 46.15 per cent in the municipal elections, whilst the Conservative vote was up from 52.34 per cent to 53.85 per cent. Tanner, D. (1991) 'Elections, Statistics and the Rise of the Labour Party 1906-31' Historical Journal 34. 4. (1991), pp. 893-908.

- 12 Thorpe, A (1997), p.53.
- 13 Morgan, K. (1979), pp.216-7.
- 14 Labour Party's Annual Report 1921.
- 15 They fought and won the Dover by-election of January 1921 with a policy protesting over high government spending and dear food. Morgan, K. (1979), p.154.
- 16 Cook, C. 'Liberals, Labour and Local Elections' (1975), p.169.
- 17 Wolverhampton Express and Star, 2 November 1922. Cook, C. 'Liberals, Labour and Local Elections' (1975), p.169.
- 18 Birmingham Mail, 2 November 1922.
- 19 Town Crier, 10 November 1922.
- 20 Ramsden, J. (1978), p.169.
- 21 According to Ramsden the Conservatives were short of money both at local level and at Central Office, so there was virtually no literature and little organisation on their side. Ibid., p.170.
- 22 Taylor, A.J.P. (1965), p.197.
- 23 Cook, C. The Age of Alignment (1975), pp.19-20. Of Labour's 142 seats 4 were won without a contest, 62 in straight fights, 72 in three- or four-cornered contests and 4 in constituencies returning two members. The composition of the Labour MPs in the 1922 parliament changed somewhat from that of 1918. In 1918 48 of the 57 MPs were trade union nominees with only 3 from the ILP. In 1922, however, those backed by the trade unions rose to 85, but ILP nominees won 32 seats, whilst 19 were supported by DLPs. Cole, G.D.H. (1948), pp.128-31.
- 24 The Liberal gains were mainly in rural seats partly as a protest at low agricultural prices. Cook, C. (1975), pp.19-20.
- 25 Cook, C. (1980), p.86.
- 26 The sub committees were concerned with:- 1. organisation and elections 2. Policy and programmes 3. Literature research and publicity 4. Finance and general purposes. Laybourn, K. Britain on the Breadline: A Social and Political History of Britain 1918-1939 (1990), p.154.



- 27 The main speakers were Wake, himself, Henderson, the secretary and a star speaker. *Ibid.*, p.154.
- 28 Labour Party Annual Report 1923, p.45. Cole points out that Woolwich and Barrow had over 1,000 members. He also claimed that “women were the making of the local Labour parties”. Cole, G.D.H. (1948), pp.141-2.
- 29 Thorpe, A. (1997), p.51.
- 30 Labour Party Annual Report 1923, p.45.
- 31 Labour relied “on extensive use of speakers and public meetings together with a very thorough canvass of the constituency”. McKibbin, R. (1974), pp.144-5.
- 32 *Ibid.*, pp.161-2.
- 33 *Ibid.*, pp.242-4.
- 34 McKibbin gives three reasons why the Labour Party was unable to emulate the achievements of the German Social Democrats. One was the lack of interest in politics of the British working class and its preference for sport, work etc. Second was the fact that working class movements had not suffered persecution as in Germany. Finally the British trade unions did not always need the Labour Party. *Ibid.*, p.246.
- 35 Howard, C. (1985), pp.66-7. See Introduction.
- 36 Savage, M. (1987), p.162. See Introduction.
- 37 *Ibid.*, p.169. Savage claims, however, that on the question of council housing the local party supported sale to occupiers.
- 38 *Ibid.*, p.170.
- 39 Reynolds, J. and Laybourn, K. (1987), p.52. Labour won Spen Valley in December 1919 and Penistone in March 1920.
- 40 *Ibid.*, pp.39-43. Labour appointed full time agents only in the big cities of Bradford and Leeds. Elsewhere only part time agents could be afforded.
- 41 Herbert Morrison warned constituencies over choosing candidates “with big personal wealth or able to command money from some organisation”. *Ibid.*, p.51.
- 42 Thorpe, A. (1990), p.115. He calculates that membership of the three unions, the NUR, AEU and TGWU (especially at first the Workers’ Union) made up 67.6 per cent of membership in 1918 and 71.5 per cent in 1924. They showed their moderation by keeping out the Communist led National Unemployed Workers’ Union.

- 43 Ibid., p.119. Thorpe describes the pacts made by the Liberals in 1922 and 1923 for municipal and parliamentary elections as “self defeating in all but the shortest of terms”. He writes that the Liberals were “left with empty slogans of a previous generation” ,
- 44 Hyman, R. (1971), pp.87-88. The railwaymen also secured significant gains after a nine-day strike in September 1919. Morgan, K. (1979), p.59-62.
- 45 Birmingham Gazette, 6 April 1921.
- 46 Ibid., 9 June 1921. The Birmingham Gazette stopped printing weekly unemployment figures after 14 July 1921.
- 47 Barnsby, G. (1998), p.397. Unfortunately Barnsby does not print references for his figures.
- 48 This was the content of replies by E. Geddes to questions by Short. 400,000 tons of coal were mined annually at Tipton before this disaster. Hansard 116, 26 May 1919, p.817 and 123, 15 December 1919, p.4.
- 49 Horsnell, C.J. The Coal Mining Trade Unions in the Black Country 1914-27. University of Wolverhampton M.A. Thesis (1991), p.43.
- 50 Ibid., p.40.
- 51 There was much discussion at this time over the problems of the iron and steel industry in the region. Iron ore had to be transported from Oxfordshire or Northamptonshire, whilst coking coal was brought in from South Wales, Lancashire or Yorkshire. This made the cost of production much higher here than in other regions. Meanwhile the local metal trades were importing French and Belgium iron and steel. See G.C.Allen (1929), pp.385-8.
- 52 The two disputes with more lost days, prior to the ironfounders strike, were the 1912 miners strike with 308 million lost days and the cotton operators in 1919 with 7.5 million. Butler, D. and Butler, G. (1994), p.371.
- 53 Allen, G.C. (1929), pp.381-3.
- 54 According to Barnsby the price of iron fell from £30 a ton in January/February 1921 to £10 to £15/10 a ton in November/December 1922. Barnsby, G. (1998), p.442.
- 55 Allen, G.C. (1929), p.387.
- 56 From a report of the meeting of the Smethwick Trades and Labour Council.  
Smethwick Telephone, 25 October 1919.
- 57 Town Crier, 30 January 1920.



- 58 Smethwick Telephone, 10 January 1920.
- 59 Around 800 women and girls went on strike in the nut and bolt industry in February 1921. In March the majority voted to accept the employers' terms. Similar strike action followed a cut in wages at GKN in Smethwick. Ibid., 25 February 1921, 18 March 1921 and 1 July 1921.
- 60 Birmingham Gazette, 6 April 1921.
- 61 Ibid., 2 April 1921.
- 62 Midland Chronicle, 8 April 1921.
- 63 Birmingham Gazette, 7 April 1921.
- 64 Ibid., 12 April 1921, 15 April 1921.
- 65 Horsnell, C.J. (1991), p.39. He quotes from the Midland Chronicle, 8 April 1921 that the Oldbury Labour Party appealed to trade unionists to vote Labour. In West Bromwich the Party Chairman explained that its object was "to educate public opinion in the fight the miners were making". Midland Chronicle, 20 April 1921.
- 66 Horsnell, C.J. (1991), p.40.
- 67 Barnsby, G. (1998), P441. Miners' wages were to be cut by 2 shillings a day in July from their level on 31 March 1921. They were to be cut by an extra 6d in August and again in September. This was better than the original offer of the 1914 wage and 50 per cent, which would have made 10/3.
- 68 Horsnell, C.J. (1991), p.44.
- 69 Hyman, R. (1971), pp.143-4. Membership of the AEU also fell nationally from 484,000 in 1920 to 234,000 in 1925. There was a similar fall in the Black Country from 6,600 to 3,300. Barnsby, G. (1998), p.443.
- 70 Town Crier, 7 January 1921 reports on a meeting at the Theatre Royal in Smethwick, where Alderman Willetts moved this resolution.
- 71 Birmingham Gazette, 6 April 1921 and 30 June 1921.
- 72 Town Crier, 1 April 1921.
- 73 Ibid., 8 July 1921 reports of a march to the Council House on the 28 June to secure higher levels of relief, urging the Mayor to act with them.
- 74 Ibid., 9 September 1921.
- 75 Ibid., 30 September 1921.

- 76 Birmingham Borough Labour Party Minutes, 15 November 1919 and 15 April 1920.
- 77 Corbett, J. The Birmingham Trades Council 1866-1966 (1966), p.116.
- 78 Chamberlain spoke at Labour Party meetings of the paper's need for financial assistance.  
Birmingham Borough Labour Party Minutes, 12 February 1920.
- 79 The Conservatives were defending 22 seats in 1919 with the Liberals on 4, Labour 2 and Independents 2. The Conservatives won 9, the Liberals 2, Labour 12 and Progressives/Independents 7. Birmingham Gazette, 3 November 1919 and Birmingham Post, 3 November 1919.
- 80 Town Crier, 7 November 1919.
- 81 Ibid.
- 82 Birmingham Gazette, 3 November 1919.
- 83 Birmingham Borough Labour Party Minutes, 12 February 1920.
- 84 Ibid., 2 March 1920.
- 85 Ibid., 14 October 1920. According to Rolfe, Hallas was later dissuaded from taking paid employment with the British Commonwealth Union, an organisation which worked for closer relations between employers and employed, only by the prospect of losing his trade union salary and retirement allowance. Rolfe, K.W.D. (1974), pp.104-5.
- 86 Birmingham Mail, 8 November 1922.
- 87 Birmingham Borough Labour Party Minutes, 13 May 1920.
- 88 Ibid., 30 March 1921. The reason given for not contesting the seat was the probability of an early General Election.
- 89 Ibid., 10 June 1920.
- 90 Ibid., 10 June 1920.
- 91 The motion deplored their action, whilst agreeing to expel from the Party any member involved in a similar act in the future. Ibid., 18 June 1920.
- 92 Three members of the Labour Group refused to sign the Pledge. At a special meeting of the Group it was decided to put members and candidates on their 'honour'. This was rejected by the party, who re-affirmed the Pledge. Ibid., 18 May 1921, 7 June 1920, 1 September 1920 and 8 September 1920.
- 93 Birmingham Gazette, 2 November 1920.



- 94 Town Crier, 6 November 1920.
- 95 Barnsby, G. (1998), p.376.
- 96 Birmingham Gazette, 9 June 1921.
- 97 Conservatives lost 4 and the Liberals lost 2. This made a new council of 64 Conservatives, 25 Labour + 3 Co-op Labour and 2 Tenants' Association, 12 Liberals + 1 Coalition Liberal and 13 Independents. Ibid., 2 November 1921.
- 98 Barnsby, G. (1998), pp.334-5. The Birmingham Trades Council refused to allow on the Unemployed Committees without paying fees. The Council claimed that the Committee was Communist controlled.
- 99 "When Labour proposed a Capital Levy, not as a substitute for existing taxation but as an addition, it did much to queer its chances with the floating voter and it cannot be denied that this has had a direct bearing on Labour's municipal losses". Birmingham Gazette, 2 November 1922.
- 100 Labour secured 48,458 votes for 6 seats at an average of 8,076 per vote.  
 Unionists secured 49,409 votes for 11 seats at an average of 4,492 per vote.  
 Independents secured 16,505 votes for 3 seats at an average of 5,501 per vote.  
 Progressives secured 5,712 votes for 1 seat at an average of 5,712 per vote.  
 Liberals secured 6,000 votes for 1 seat at an average of 6,000 per vote.  
Town Crier, 10 November 1922.
- 101 Birmingham Gazette, 17 November 1922.
- 102 Town Crier, 17 November 1922.
- 103 Ibid.
- 104 The letter, which was printed on 11 November 1922 read:-
- "General Election
- All men and all married women employers are highly warned:-
- That this firm could not carry on for a single year under a Labour Government. Large numbers of girls and young women for years and years have found good, regular employment here at a lucrative and always fair wage, and should remind their parents that this could not continue if they vote Labour".
- I.A.Goldberg and Sons.
- Ibid., 17 November 1922

- 105 Labour Party Annual Report 1920, p.93, Annual Report 1921, p.129, Annual Report 1922, p.155 and Annual Report 1923, p. 162. Yardley was not one of the inner wards, but a division on the edge of the city, where many new council houses were built.
- 106 The six agents were:- T.W.Wright (West Bromwich), H.J.Short (Wednesbury), J.Whittacker (Wolverhampton West), E.Baldwyn (Walsall), C.C.Jones (Smethwick), J.Price (Dudley).  
Labour Party Annual Report 1920, p.208.
- 107 Labour Party Annual Report 1922, p.51.
- 108 Smethwick Telephone, 24 April 1919.
- 109 Labour Party Annual Report 1919, pp.93-109. See Appendices Table F.
- 110 See Appendices Table F.
- 111 The individual affiliation fees for Walsall L.R.C. in 1920 were £3/6/8 (400 members) and for Wolverhampton West £3 (360 members). These were the highest in the region for that year, as the other Black Country parties contributed only the minimum of £1/10. The Dudley Labour Party did raise £6/16/8 in 1919, but this was an exception to the £1/10 raised for the other years. Labour Party Annual Report 1920, pp.92-110, Annual Report 1921, pp.126-7. See Appendices Table F.
- 112 Labour Party Annual Report 1922, pp.152-3. The Wolverhampton Labour Party had split into East and West in 1919, but the Eastern branch made no recorded return for 1919, probably because they failed to meet the minimum figure, and only the minimum £1/10 fee for 1920, 1921 and 1922. See Appendices Table F.
- 113 The number of affiliated AEU members also fell from 177,000 in 1920 to 139,381 in 1922. Labour Party Annual Report 1921, p.87 and Annual Report 1923, p.137.
- 114 The ASE had 6 branches with members paying 6d per member per year, whilst ASLEF members contributed 1/- per member per year. Wolverhampton Labour Party Minutes, Local Party Meeting 17 April 1919, Executive Meeting, 3 July 1919, Local Meeting, 3 July 1919.
- 115 Ibid., Local Party Meeting, 1 May 1919.
- 116 Ibid., Local Party Meeting, 4 September 1919.
- 117 The Urban District Council results for 1919 can be found in the Birmingham Gazette, 9 April 1919, Express and Star, 8 April 1919 and Birmingham Post, 9 April 1919. The Tipton results can be found in Barnsby, G. (1998), p.419. Unfortunately Barnsby does not list his sources.
- 118 Cook, C. The Age of Alignment (1975), p.58.



119 Wolverhampton Labour Party Minutes, 4 September 1919 and 16 September 1919.

120 See Appendices Table E.

121 Labour captured 6,267 votes, whilst their opponents took only 5,130, out of a total of 20,967.

Wolverhampton Labour Party Minutes, 8 November 1919.

122 Midland Advertiser and Wednesbury Herald, 8 November 1919.

123 Midland Chronicle, 7 November 1919.

124 Town Crier, 14 November 1919.

125 Wolverhampton Express and Star, 30 March 1920.

126 See Appendices Table E for local election results.

127 Town Crier, 1 October 1920.

128 According to The Times the Coalition Whips thought that Boscawen would have a 'walk-over' on presenting himself for re-election. The Times, 3 March 1921.

129 Cook also claimed that the collapse of Liberal morale at constituency level was another factor.

Cook, C. Age of Alignment (1975), p.12.

130 The newspaper supported Boscawen's policy, claiming that "he was doing the nation a distinct service". Dudley Herald, 4 March 1921.

131 Birmingham Post, 4 March 1921.

132 The Times, 3 March 1921.

133 The newspaper claimed that Boscawen's department "are continuing a war wheat policy and the farmers are to be subsidised out of the public purse". Birmingham Gazette, 4 March 1921.

134 Morgan, K. (1979), p.171.

135 Birmingham Gazette, 28 February 1921.

136 Ibid., 3 March 1921.

137 Ibid., 2 March 1921.

138 Ibid., 6 April 1921.

139 Dudley Herald, 25 February 1921.

140 Birmingham Gazette, 2 March 1921.

141 Ibid., 28 February 1921.

142 Ibid., 4 March 1921.

143 The paper called for “unity of action in both the political and the industrial field”. Town Crier, 11 March 1921.

144 Wilson himself was rather contemptuously dismissed as “a railwayman from Newcastle”.  
Birmingham Post, 4 March 1921

145 Wolverhampton Express and Star 5 April 1921. In the 1919 and 1920 elections a third of the councillors were elected in a list. In 1921, however, all the Council was up for re-election for the first time in wards.

146 Smethwick Telephone, 22 October, 29 October and 5 November 1921.

147 Town Crier, 4 November 1921.

148 Barnsby, G. (1998), p.424. Emma Sproson spent 3 months in prison before the war as a militant suffragette and once went on hunger strike. Obituary in the Express and Star, 23 December 1936.

149 Wolverhampton Express and Star, 2 November 1921.

150 Midland Chronicle, 14 October, 28 October and 4 November 1921.

151 Midland Advertiser and Wednesbury Herald, 5 November 1921.

152 Ibid., 29 October 1921.

153 There was, for instance, a letter from a local vicar complaining of the manifestos of two of the Coalition Conservative candidates on these grounds in the Smethwick Telephone, 12 November 1921.

154 For further details on these elections see Ward, J. (1993), pp.75-6.

155 The Times, 2 March 1921. Labour had captured Manchester Clayton and Camberwell during February 1921.

156 The two seats gained were East Stafford and Willenhall, which was part of the Wolverhampton East division. Wolverhampton Express and Star, 3 March 1922.

157 See Appendices Table A.

158 Birmingham Post, 8 March 1922.

159 Birmingham Mail, 8 March 1922.

160 Labour Candidates Address to the Electors

Walkden pledged that he would strive to adopt the following measures:-

1. The provision of Useful Work or Adequate Maintenance for the Unemployed – this to be a National Responsibility, not charged to Local Rates.



2. Taxation of Land Values, Revision of the Income Tax, and the exercise of Strict Economy in Administration.
3. The construction of sufficient Houses for the People, and the fixing of Reasonable Rents.
4. Reduction in the Cost of Living and the Stoppage of all Profiteering.
5. Free Trade, the Restoration of International Exchange, and the Removal of all Taxes on Food.
6. Universal Peace and Disarmament by means of the League of Nations, which must include every country.
7. Fair treatment of all Ex-Service Men, particularly in regard to Pensions.
8. The due carrying out of the Education Act and the Burnham Report, which give a minimum of Justice to the Children and Teachers.
9. Pensions for Widowed Mothers and fairer Old Age Pension arrangements.

161 Wolverhampton Express and Star, 1 March 1922.

162 Ibid., 2 March 1922.

163 Ibid., 3 March 1922.

164 Ibid., 2 March 1922.

165 This was certainly the view of The Times, which stated that “unemployment has been made the chief issue of the contest”. The Times, 7 March 1922.

166 Wolverhampton Express and Star, 2 March 1922.

167 The Times, 7 March 1922.

168 Ibid., 2 March 1922.

169 Birmingham Post, 7 March 1922.

170 In Wolverhampton the number of unemployed fell from 13,045 to 12,883 in the week before the election. Nationally there was a fall in unemployment of 80,000 in the same week.

Wolverhampton Express and Star, 2, 3 and 6 March 1922.

171 Ibid., 1 March 1922.

172 The leaflet claimed that in Walkden’s union, members’ contributions had risen £34,946 between 1918-20, whilst benefits were cut by £1,165 and management costs had risen £36,853. The Times, 2 March 1922.

173 Wolverhampton Express and Star, 1 March 1922.

174 Birmingham Gazette, 8 March 1922.

175 The Times, 7 March 1922.

176 Ibid.

177 The leaflet claimed that members' contributions rose £34,946 between 1918-1920, whilst benefits were cut by £1,165 and management costs rose by £36,853. Ibid., 2 March 1922.

178 Wolverhampton Express and Star, 6 March 1922. The Wolverhampton Express and Star had supported Thorne and Bird in the 1918 Election.

179 Ibid., 8 March 1922.

180 Birmingham Post, 8 March 1922.

181 Birmingham Mail, 8 March 1922.

182 The Party report also considered that a "very heavy poll" was another factor in the result. Labour Party Annual Report 1922, p.59.

183 Birmingham Gazette, 8 March 1922.

184 For further details of these elections see Ward, J. (1993), pp.76-7.

185 Midland Advertiser and Wednesbury Herald, 4 November 1922. The result caused the paper's editorial to appeal "to the intellectual electorate of Wednesbury to make short work of such futile propaganda and destroy for this generation a programme, which if it came into effect, would undermine thrift and enterprise, increase unemployment and shatter the whole commercial and industrial fabric".

186 Birmingham Post, 7 November 1922

187 Labour's failure to capture the Soho seat was put down to prejudice against a woman candidate, especially amongst women voters themselves. Town Crier, 10 November 1922.

188 Birmingham Gazette, 27 October, 28 October, and 30 October 1922.

189 Ibid., 2 November 1922.

190 Wolverhampton Express and Star, 2 November 1922.

191 Birmingham Mail, 2 November 1922.

192 The Ratepayers' Coalition stood in three wards in Walsall, gaining two seats from Labour. Birmingham Gazette, 2 November 1922.

193 Posters reading "Socialism is the Red Road to Russia" and "Call a spade a spade and the Labour Party by the right name Socialists" are quoted in the Town Crier, 10 November 1922.



- 194 According to these reports only Walsall and Wolverhampton West contributed more than the basic £1/10 in these years. See Appendices Table F.
- 195 Birmingham Gazette, 25 October 1922.
- 196 Smethwick Telephone, 14 October 1922. Birmingham Gazette, 25 October 1922.
- 197 Hansard 114, 7 April 1919, pp.1744-7. It was also pointed out that the infantile mortality rates per 1,000 amongst skilled artisans was 100/130, amongst miners was 160 and amongst unskilled and casual labourers was 150/250. Hansard 114, 7 April 1919, p.1456.
- 198 Birmingham Post, 7 November 1922.
- 199 Smethwick Telephone, 11 November 1922.
- 200 The local press congratulated the Unionists for having “found a candidate of so signal attainments”. These were reckoned to be his local links, his concern for the welfare of the people and his knowledge of imperial matters. Smethwick Telephone, 30 September 1922.
- 201 Ibid., 4 November 1922.
- 202 Birmingham Post, 14 November 1922.
- 203 Cook describes “a serious Liberal decay in Birmingham and the Black Country”. Wednesbury as well as Smethwick remained totally unorganised until 1925. Cook, C. The Age of Alignment (1975), p.34.
- 204 Town Crier, 24 November 1922.
- 205 Ibid., 17 November 1922.
- 206 During the 1921 recession unemployment in West Bromwich rose from 3,404 on the 25 March to 5,835 on the 1 July. Birmingham Gazette, 7 April and 7 July 1921.
- 207 On the 9 May there was a march by 2,000 unemployed, demanding relief. Midland Chronicle, 13 May 1921
- 208 On the 8 May Councillor Sutton addressed a miners’ meeting, presided over by the Miners’ Federation. Ibid., 13 May 1921 On the 13 May an open-air meeting was addressed by Guest, the Labour agent. Ibid., 20 May 1921
- 209 Birmingham Gazette, 3 November 1922.
- 210 Labour Searchlight, Election Poster, November 1922. Labour Party Records. The poster listed price increases since 1914, including bread from 5¾d to 9¼d. It also condemned the profiteering

of the Coats family of cotton spinners and the shipping interests of Bonar Law. Wages, meanwhile, had been reduced by £7million in 1921 and by £3.9m in 1922, down to September.

211 Birmingham Mail, 9 November 1922.

212 Birmingham Post, 7 November 1922.

213 Ibid., 2 November 1922.

214 Ibid., 7 November 1922.

215 Midland Chronicle, 10 November 1922.

216 Birmingham Gazette, 9 November 1922. The Liberals were almost certainly short of cash, as they failed to contest any seats in the municipal elections in 1922. Instead an Independent stood in the Lyng constituency, which the Liberals had captured in 1921. See Appendices.

217 West Bromwich Free Press, 17 November 1922.

218 Birmingham Post, 7 November 1922.

219 West Bromwich Free Press, 3 November 1922. The paper went on to claim that “the levy on capital, the principle of nationalisation ... would ruin our industries..... produce in this country something very much akin to the state of things which has been brought about by the Soviet Government in Russia”.

220 Birmingham Gazette, 7 November 1922.

221 Barnsby, G. (1998), P419.

222 During the 1921 recession unemployment in Wednesbury rose from 2,998 on 25 March to 5,919 on 1 July. Darlaston was less affected, rising from 1,599 to 2,748 between the same dates.  
Birmingham Gazette, 7 April and 7 July 1921.

223 Birmingham Post, 7 November 1922.

224 Wolverhampton Express and Star, 7 November 1922.

225 Ibid., 11 November 1922.

226 Midland Advertiser and Wednesbury Herald, 11 November 1922. The paper urged the electorate “to resist such a mad policy to the uttermost and to record their vote against the Labour Socialist candidate”.

227 He said in a speech at Darlaston that “he was going to light a torch for righteousness in the constituency”. Ibid., 11 November 1922.

228 Tipton Herald, 11 November 1922.



229 Birmingham Post, 14 November 1922.

230 Tipton Herald, 11 November 1922.

231 Ibid., 18 November 1922.

232 Birmingham Post, 8 November 1922. Despite being a Coalition Liberal Beyfus was supported by the Conservatives. He denounced nationalisation and the Capital Levy.

233 Wolverhampton Express and Star, 8 November 1922.

234 Birmingham Post, 8 November 1922.

235 Birmingham Gazette, 23 June 1921.

236 Birmingham Mail, 10 November 1922.

237 Wolverhampton Express and Star, 7 November 1922.

238 Birmingham Gazette, 10 November 1922.

239 Wolverhampton Express and Star, 10 November 1922.

240 Ibid., 3 November 1922.

241 Ibid., 8 November 1922.

242 Ibid., 14 November 1922. Sitch claimed to have received 15,000 letters of thanks, including 1,500 from ex-servicemen. Birmingham Gazette, 4 November 1922.

243 The Kingswinford party paid in the minimum of £1/10, representing 180 individual members, throughout this period. Labour Party Annual Report 1920, 1921, 1922, 1923. See Appendices Table F.

244 Birmingham Post, 6 November 1922

245 Ibid., 6 November 1922.

246 Ibid., 13 November 1922.

247 Birmingham Mail, 9 November 1922.

248 Birmingham Post, 31 October 1922.

249 Ibid., 13 November 1922. Wilson's union management expenses in 1920 were said to be £250,000. Wilson's pledges were said to be better wages, no starvation and no unemployment. On unemployment benefit, he promised a rate of 20 shillings a week.

250 Ibid., 13 November 1922. Not all Liberals, however, backed the Conservatives, as at least one leading member, J.C. Abrahams, was reported as advising Liberals to vote Labour. Wolverhampton Express and Star, 7 November 1922.

251 Ibid., 7 November 1922.

252 Birmingham Post, 6 November 1922.

253 Dudley Herald, 11 November 1922. The paper also described Socialism as “a visionary monstrosity”. Dudley Herald, 18 November 1922. It also posed and provided their answer to the question:- ‘What the Labour Party Want To Do?’

Make Egypt Independent

Let the Germans off

Tax the British More

Tax the People’s Savings

Nationalise Railways and Mines

Abolish Private Ownership and Property (as in Russia)

Ibid., 4 November 1922.

254 Labour Party Annual Report 1923, p.52.

255 Labour Party Annual Report 1923, pp.159-60. This was the same membership as when Wilson won his by-election victory in 1921, suggesting that there was no improvement in organisation.

Labour Party Annual Report 1922, p.52-3.

256 Barnsby, G. (1998), p.397.

257 Jones, G. (1969), pp.20-21.

258 Wolverhampton Express and Star, 3 November 1922. He also stated that “whatever the Government has promised to pay, whether on War Savings Certificates, War Bonds or War Loan, Funding or Conversion or Victory Bonds must be paid until the debt is redeemed. Any other course would be dishonest”.

259 Walkden’s Election Address, which was printed in the Wolverhampton Express and Star. Ibid., 4 November 1922.

260 Ibid., 3 November 1922.

261 Birmingham Post, 4 November 1922.

262 Wolverhampton Express and Star, 14 November 1922.

263 Ibid., 8 November 1922, 11 November 1922. Bird’s claim was that whilst membership had fallen from 87,000 to 80,000, union expenses had risen from £60,000 to £66,000.

264 Ibid., 10 November 1922.



265 Birmingham Post, 4 November 1922

266 Wolverhampton Express and Star, 7 November and 8 November 1922.

267 Ibid., 10 November 1922. Walkden agreed to stand by the Labour Manifesto on the matter, unlike Foot, the Labour candidate in the East division.

268 Ibid., 4 November 1922. Walkden accused Bird of voting against Labour's proposed Right to Work Bill, which would have provided national employment schemes with the co-operation of local authorities. He also voted against another Labour proposal to raise unemployment pay for those with children. He was also not present to vote an increase of child allowance from 1 to 2 shillings.

269 Labour Party Annual Report 1922 p. 153, Labour Party Annual Report 1923, p.160. At a Ward meeting of the Wolverhampton Labour Party on the 31 December 1922, there were reports of "poor attendance at meetings" and the need for "a greater effort to raise money locally".  
Wolverhampton Labour Party Minutes, Ward Council Meeting,, 31 December 1922.

270 Wolverhampton Express and Star, 14 November 1922.

271 The Birmingham Post thought that the appearance of the Labour Party in the East was "curiously belated having regard to the purely industrial character of the division". Birmingham Post, 4 November 1922  
Wolverhampton East had the minimum affiliation fees throughout the 1920s. They never rose above £1/10, which represented 180 members. Labour Party Annual Report 1923, p.160

272 During the winter of 1921 a levy of 1 shilling a week was made on employed members to pay for benefits for the unemployed. Although wages did fall in 1921 in line with prices relations between employers and employed remained good, with the former providing premises for a meat shop for the unemployed. Barnsby, G. (1998), pp.443-5.

273 Wolverhampton Express and Star, 9 November 1922.

274 Ibid., 10 November 1922.

275 Gardner, K.D. (1994), p.82

276 Foot claimed that Labour was suffering "every form of misrepresentation and abuse". The Wolverhampton Express and Star, however, claimed that "Labour's greatest enemy was not the Liberals nor the Conservatives but the apathy of their own class". Wolverhampton Express and Star, 7 November 1922

- 277 Ibid., 4 November 1922.
- 278 Ibid., 10 November 1922.
- 279 Birmingham Post, 13 November 1922 reported that Foot could be “disregarded”.
- 280 Wolverhampton Express and Star, 9 November 1922.
- 281 Ibid., 7 November 1922.
- 282 Ibid., 9 November 1922.
- 283 Ibid., 8 November 1922.
- 284 Pinson was considered to lack experience, so Leo Amery, a former candidate in the division, was brought in to assist. Gardner, K.D. (1994), p.83.
- 285 Birmingham Post, 6 November 1922.
- 286 Birmingham Gazette, 2 June 1921.
- 287 Wolverhampton Express and Star, 14 November 1922. Baker claimed that only those earning over £5,000 a year would be expected to contribute.
- 288 Ibid., 9 November 1922. Baker also pointed out that whilst the real wages of the workers had been falling, those on incomes of £10-15,000 had nearly doubled since the beginning of the war, along with “a big growth on those on big incomes”.
- 289 Ibid.
- 290 Birmingham Post, 2 November 1922, Wolverhampton Express and Star, 14 November 1922.
- 291 Birmingham Post, 2 November 1922.
- 292 Birmingham Gazette, 30 June 1921. This was the total for 24 June 1921. The figure of 6,161 for October 1922 was given in the Midland Chronicle, 9 November 1923.
- 293 The Walsall Guardians were spending £3,000 a week on aid for the unemployed. In 1922 the Trades Council asked the Town Council to bring pressure to bear on the Government to further subsidise local relief works. Dean, K.G. (1972), p.73.
- 294 Dennison urged striking miners at a meeting in Kidderminster “to keep your powder dry for constitutional action in the ballot box”. Walsall Observer, 16 April 1921. Quoted in Dean, K.G. (1972) p.71.
- 295 Cooper disapproved of Lloyd George’s honour’s system, but decided in June 1921 to back the Coalition out of fear of Direct Action and Socialism. Dean, K.G. (1972), pp.90-1.
- 296 Birmingham Post, 7 November 1922.



- 297 Dean, K.G. (1972), p.93. Collins did stress his support for “cutting down all unnecessary expenditure and all waste”. Wolverhampton Express and Star, 7 November 1922.
- 298 Birmingham Mail, 9 November 1922.
- 299 Birmingham Post, 14 November 1922.
- 300 Walsall Observer, 18 November 1922.
- 301 Birmingham Mail, 9 November 1922.
- 302 A good instance of Dennison’s moderation was his decision to call the Capital Levy the War Redemption Fund. Birmingham Post, 7 November 1922.
- 303 Dennison also claimed that Liberalism was “as dead as a doornail. It has no vision and no policy”. Walsall Observer, 10 February 1923
- 304 Dean, K.G. (1972), pp.94-5.
- 305 Councillor Thicket said that “he hoped Mr Dennison would live to fight another day, not, however, in Walsall, but somewhere where the loyalty and solidarity of the workers was more evident”. Walsall Observer, 10 February 1923
- 306 Birmingham Post, 6 November 1922.
- 307 Labour Party Annual Report 1922, pp.192-3.
- 308 Labour Party Annual Report 1923, pp.159-60. Stourbridge was not the only Black Country constituency to make no financial return for individual members in 1922. Both Wednesbury and West Bromwich also made none, despite having their MPs re-elected.
- 309 The highest figure for Oldbury was 5,162 for 24 June 1921 Birmingham Gazette, 30 June 1921. For Stourbridge, with Brierley Hill, 8,279 for 20 May 1921 Ibid., 26 May 1921. Brierley Hill itself was in the Kingswinford division.
- 310 Birmingham Mail, 10 November 1922.
- 311 Birmingham Post, 6 November 1922.
- 312 See Appendices Tables Band D.
- 313 The six agents in 1920 were T.W.Wright – West Bromwich, H.J.Short – Wednesbury, J.Whittaker – Wolverhampton West, E.Baldwyn – Walsall, C.C.Jones – Smethwick, J.Price – Dudley. Labour Party Annual Report 1920, p.208.
- 314 Cook sees the Liberal position in Birmingham and the Black Country as “the worst scene of Liberal decay”. Cook, C. The Age of Alignment (1975), p.34.

315 49 of Labour's 57 MPs were sponsored by the trade unions. Thorpe, A. (1997), pp.47-8. Morgan too describes them as "second rate trade unionists, irregular in attendance, uninspiring in debate..." Morgan, K. (1979), pp.221-2.



## CHAPTER 3 – THE 1923 AND 1924 ELECTIONS

### A. NATIONAL DEVELOPMENTS

By 1923 the Labour Party had emerged as the major opposition to the Conservatives in most of the country. The National Agent, Egerton Wake, announced that of the 603 constituencies only 6 were without a Labour Party organisation. There were also 1,031 Women's Sections with 120,000 members.<sup>(1)</sup> Although individual membership remained low, there were over 4 million affiliated trade union members in 1921 and 1922, although this figure did drop to 3.3 million in 1923. The Labour Party's income was also increasing from £25,537 in 1919 to a temporary peak of £61,178 in 1922.<sup>(2)</sup>

Within a year another General Election was called mainly around the issue of tariff reform. Bonar Law had pledged not to introduce Protection before referring the matter to the electorate. Baldwin, who had replaced Law as Prime Minister, decided that Protection would help solve the unemployment problem, so a fresh election was called for December 1923.<sup>(3)</sup> The move had the effect of uniting the significant group of former Coalition Conservatives, led by Austen Chamberlain behind Baldwin. It also reunited the Liberal Party under the banner of Free Trade, with Asquith as its leader.

Baldwin's decision to call an election was not entirely supported either by his Cabinet colleagues or by backbenchers. Lancashire Conservatives, who were traditional Free Traders, opposed the decision, although Baldwin rejected any food taxes. According to Cook the Conservatives entered the election "confused, divided and unenthusiastic with the policy of Protection only half thought out". Public opinion, he claims, believed that "he was a puppet in the hands of the Party hierarchy".<sup>(4)</sup> As for the details of his proposals, Baldwin was "deafeningly silent".<sup>(5)</sup> The Economist, in a celebrated editorial, claimed that "the Prime Minister has invited the country to sell its birthright for a mess of pottage".<sup>(6)</sup> The national press too was "unenthusiastic" with the Rothermere and Beaverbrook papers attacking Baldwin.<sup>(7)</sup> Later in the campaign the Conservatives, sensing a negative response, switched tactics to stressing the dangers of Socialism in the Labour Party, with lurid details of what was happening in Russia.<sup>(8)</sup>

The Liberals fought for Free Trade, arguing that Protection would bring higher food prices. At the same time they attacked Labour's nationalisation proposals and the capital levy as damaging to the economy. Yet the Liberals had few radical proposals of their own to offer. Cook claims that their campaign "revealed a party that could offer only an anaemic conservatism".<sup>(9)</sup> This enabled the Labour Party to stand as the radical alternative.

MacDonald, who had been re-elected leader on his return to parliament in the 1922 General Election, sought to sideline the Liberals and present Labour as the alternative government.(10) This meant moderating some of his own supporters more extreme views. He was aware, for instance, that, despite initially supporting his leadership, the Clydesiders in parliament wanted Labour to preach a class war and avoid contacts with the opposition. MacDonald's election strategy was to fight the Conservatives with a Free Trade policy, whilst proposing more progressive policies than the Liberals. Yet MacDonald was cautious over the capital levy, since he was aware that it laid the party open to accusations of confiscation and Bolshevism. Indeed he later confided to Dalton that he thought the levy had cost Labour 50 seats.(11)

The result of the General Election was indecisive with the Conservatives winning 258 seats with 38% of the vote, the Liberals 159 with 29.7 per cent and Labour 191 with 30.7 per cent. The Conservatives gained 20 seats mainly in rural areas at the expense of the Liberals, but lost 108, of which 41 were to Labour in industrial areas and 67 to the Liberals, 23 in boroughs and 44 in counties.(12) It seems that whilst rural areas favoured tariff reform, elsewhere the fear of 'dear food' told against the Conservatives.

The Labour Party gained 63 seats, losing 16, whilst the Liberals gained 80, losing 38. The Liberals lost seats to Labour in the industrial East Midlands, London, Bristol and Norwich. Their survival in many industrial seats was only due to local pacts with the Conservatives.(13) Labour's total vote rose from 4,439,780 in 1922 to 5,489,087 in 1923. Of Labour's 191 MPs, 101 were backed by trade unions, 39 by the ILP and 39 by Divisional Parties.(14) Labour's biggest advance was in Greater London, where 21 new seats were gained, giving a total of 37. However, the party still failed to capture any seats in Liverpool or Birmingham.(15) Egerton Wake, in his Report, admitted that the election was "a great strain on the resources of the party, which was taxed to the utmost by this effort".(16)

A comparison with 1922 is not easy to make, because of the presence then of former Coalition Liberals working with the Conservatives. Cook has, however, analysed seats, where there was a comparable contest. Thus in the 53 seats, where Conservatives fought Labour in both elections, there was a swing of 5.2 per cent to Labour. Labour performed better in borough seats, but the Conservatives did well in chemical and engineering towns in the North West and in Birmingham and the Black Country.(17) In three-cornered contests the Conservatives were down 4.9 per cent, whilst the Liberals were up 4.1 per cent and Labour 0.8 per cent. Liberals were outperforming Labour in rural



constituencies. In the 25 seats where Labour fought the Liberals only, there was a swing of 2.7 per cent to Labour but not in the rural ones.(18)

Cook sees Asquith's decision to put Labour into power in January 1924 as 'decisive' for the fortunes of the Liberal Party. Had the Conservatives won or the Liberals come second, Cook believes the situation might have been different for them.(19) He believes that the aim of MacDonald's Government was to reduce the Liberals to 'parliamentary impotence'. Thus there was to be no political deal with them, despite being dependent on their support. Instead the key to his administration was to follow moderate policies in order to win over middle-class Liberal voters for a forthcoming election.(20) Marquand believes there were personal factors behind MacDonald's policy, as he found Asquith's tone "patronising" and thought Lloyd George "cynical and unprincipled".(21)

It has also been claimed that MacDonald believed socialism would only emerge, if capitalism were restored.(22) Snowden's Budget, for instance, was essentially a Liberal one. The capital levy was dropped, the McKenna duties were ended and taxes cut.(23) In industrial relations, far from dismantling the Emergency Powers Act, MacDonald proposed using it, when a national dock strike was called in February and again over a London transport strike in March. This hardly made him popular with the trade unions or with the ILP. Meanwhile unemployment remained at well over one million with the government seeming to have no solution for it. Their one lasting achievement is generally accepted to be Wheatley's Housing Act, which opened the way for a large council house building programme. Even so this was a long-term measure, which only became apparent later. Given the Government's minority position it could be argued that there was little choice for MacDonald. Nevertheless his opponents on the Left called for a more radical programme, which, if defeated in Parliament, could then be put to the electorate.

It seemed at first that MacDonald's plan was working, as in by-elections held during 1924 Labour increased its vote in their areas at the expense of the Liberals. The Conservatives too had their way of frightening Liberal voters into the Conservative camp, by arousing the electorate with talk of the 'Socialist' threat and the so-called Bolshevik nature of the Labour Party.(24) This policy seemed to peak with a big attack on Labour over the Russian Treaty of August 1924, which involved a loan to Russia to help her to start repaying pre revolutionary debts.

According to Pugh, MacDonald only intended running in office for a short time, in order to show that Labour was fit to govern, after which he would find a way out "before basic economic and social



questions had to be faced".(25) His chance came in September 1924 over Labour's decision to abandon the prosecution of the Communist, J.R.Campbell, who had urged soldiers not to fire on fellow workers. The Conservatives backed a compromise move by Asquith to set up a select committee to investigate the matter. The government was defeated and MacDonald insisted on a dissolution.

The key feature of the 1924 General Election was the collapse of the Liberal vote. The Conservatives sought to use the Russian Treaty and the Campbell case as the basis for 'a Red Scare campaign', although Baldwin, himself, acted with some moderation. Having reorganised the Conservatives and renounced Protection, he called for "sane common sense government".(26) In the constituencies, however, "a rabid and emotional anti-Communist campaign developed". In particular there were references to MacDonald's wartime pacifism and to Labour's apparent threat to religion and family life. Much of this seemed to be aimed at women and wavering Liberal voters.(27) The campaign culminated on the eve of poll with the publication in the Daily Mail of the Zinoviev Letter.(28)

The Liberals, on the other hand, were in a state of disarray. The number of their candidates was down from 457 to 340. They were short of funds and their organisation was in decline. Many Liberals were involved in anti-Socialist pacts and where there was no local candidate, they were usually urged to vote Conservative.(29) The Liberals in their election addresses put most emphasis on Free Trade, land reform and the Russian Treaty, but made less mention of Lloyd George's plans to develop national resources. It meant that they were left without a distinctive policy of their own.(30)

The Labour organisation was expanding into rural areas with the party contesting 101 new seats, of which 50 were for the first time.(31) Essentially the party was fighting a defensive campaign, pointing out that their lack of achievement in Government was due to being in a minority, which needed Liberal support. The Labour manifesto remained moderate, promising to reorganise mining, tax land values and set up a national electricity generating system. The capital levy and nationalisation were virtually ignored this time, as was any clear policy to deal with unemployment. There is evidence in the last week of the campaign of growing tenseness in the constituencies, perhaps in response to Conservative campaigning. There were, for instance, complaints of Labour inspired rowdyism at meetings.(32)

The result was to be an overwhelming victory for the Conservatives, who secured 412 seats with 46.8 per cent of the vote compared with 38 per cent in 1923. Labour came second with 151 seats, which was a net loss of 42. However, they secured one million extra voters and their proportion of the vote rose from 30.7 per cent to 33.3 per cent.(33) The Liberals, on the other hand, lost 114 seats,



leaving them with just 40, whilst their proportion of the vote dropped from 29.7 per cent to only 17.8 per cent. It is, however, not strictly accurate to compare nationally the proportion of votes in 1924 with 1923 as more seats were contested, especially in Ulster, which increased the total Conservative vote.

Labour made 16 gains from the Liberals, mainly in Yorkshire, Scotland and the North East. They also made 6 gains from the Conservatives with the party doing well in the North East, Yorkshire, the West Midlands and Merseyside. Labour's biggest losses came in London, especially the suburbs, and in Scotland.(34) Of Labour's 64 losses 40 were in straight fights with the Conservatives, whilst 15 of their 22 gains came in three-cornered fights.(35) The main reason why Labour did badly was the collapse of the Liberal vote. There were fewer three-cornered contests than in 1923, as the Liberals put up 100 less candidates. This was partly due to finance and partly to anti-Socialist pacts. Hence 27 seats, which Labour had won in three-cornered contests in 1923, were lost to single opponents in 1924, although Labour's share of the poll increased in each of them.(36)

McKibbin sees the 1924 Election as a turning point for the Liberals, whose vote was now to become "a quasi-Conservative vote, a protest vote by social groups, who would in future normally vote Conservative".(37) Only 7 Liberals were elected in three cornered fights. According to Cook of the 40 Liberal survivors "only 15 could be said to be unaided by Conservatives" and of these 7 were in Wales and 4 in Scotland.(38) It is for this reason that Cook claims that "the real victors of the 1924 Election were the Labour Party".(39)

According to the Report of Labour's National Agent the constituencies attributed their losses to "the operation of pacts between the Liberals and Tories in many areas, to the heavy Tory poll due to the 'Red Letter scare' and to Liberal voters deserting their own candidates".(40) Most historians are agreed that the Zinoviev Letter made little difference to the result, although it may have increased the Conservative majority.(41) The main factor was the decline of the Liberals, which had been the key strategy of both Labour and Conservative during the campaign. In particular Baldwin's abandonment of Protection and his use of Red Scare tactics during the campaign undermined the Liberals. Another handicap for the party at this time was the appeal of Baldwin amongst middle-class and moderate working-class voters. His most recent biographer has shown how under his leadership the Conservatives were able to capture and shape the middle ground, winning the support of many Liberal voters.(42)

Cook has analysed the results in 265 seats, which were fought by the same parties in 1923 and 1924. In 39 constituencies, where the Conservatives fought the Liberals, there was a swing of 9.1 per cent to the Conservatives, compared with one of 4.5 per cent in the 80 seats, where Labour fought the Conservatives. In both cases the swing was greatest in middle-class constituencies. Indeed in 7 seats there was actually a swing to Labour, whilst in mining seats the swing to the Conservatives was only 3.7 per cent. In the 123 three cornered contests the Conservative vote was up 8.6 per cent, Labour's was up 2.7 per cent and the Liberal's down 11.3 per cent. Only in Greater London was there a high swing of 9.3 per cent from Labour to the Conservatives, compared with 2.6 per cent nationally.(43)

## B. REGIONAL DEVELOPMENTS

### 1. THE LABOUR PARTY IN BIRMINGHAM

By October 1923 unemployment in Birmingham had fallen to 41,934, which was well down on the peak of June 1921, but similar to the level of October 1922.(44) The industrial recession, coupled with the defeat of the Engineers following their lockout, had seriously depleted the resources of the local Labour Party. Affiliation fees from individual members, given in Labour's Annual Report, show returns for just 7 of the 12 divisions, with only Yardley contributing more than the minimum £1/10.(45)

In the November municipal elections Labour made 28 gains nationally with 8 of these being in the West Midlands.(46) The verdict on this in the Birmingham Gazette was that "Labour seems to have done rather better than hold its own".(47) In Birmingham, however, where Labour was defending only three seats, the party lost two of them, whilst gaining one other. The Town Crier blamed Labour's lack of success in Birmingham on "the apathy of the very people whom the Labour Party desires to help".(48) It also lamented the party's financial resources, which had led to the absence of "an effective distribution of readable literature.... to counteract the influence of the anti-Labour press". In many wards the local Labour Party "could not afford to do more than issue an address and the usual poll card". In Sheffield, by comparison, where the party made five gains, the distribution of the Sheffield 'election special' was three times that of the Town Crier.(49)

With Protection the main issue in the 1923 General Election, the Unionist Party in Birmingham was fully behind Stanley Baldwin. The Birmingham Post, for instance, claimed that only the Unionists had anything "that is both tangible and valuable to offer for the relief of unemployment". The Labour programme was dismissed as destructive of industrial enterprise, whilst the Liberals were considered to



have “practically nothing to offer”.(50) Indeed the Liberals in Birmingham had candidates in only 5 of the 12 seats, despite their apparent national revival under the banner of Free Trade. It meant that the Birmingham Gazette warned Liberal voters, who were in a constituency where there was a straight fight between Labour and Conservatives, to put ‘Free Trade first’. The paper was reluctant, however, to endorse Labour, pointing to MacDonald’s stated aim of destroying the Liberals as a political force.(51)

The Labour Party itself was fighting only 9 of the 12 Birmingham Divisions, which was a reflection on their lack of resources. The Town Crier complained that Unionist and Liberal employers were using “intimidation of the grossest kind” by warning that, if Labour were returned and brought in a capital levy, they would have to close down their works.(52) The Labour Party found it hard to counter the Unionist case, as they were fighting the issue which gave Unionism its distinctive feature. At one time it was thought that Percival Bower might capture Aston for Labour, but this was not to be as the Unionists retained all 12 seats.(53)

Labour’s share of the vote in the 9 seats that they contested was 37 per cent which was an increase on the 36 per cent achieved in 1922.(54) The party’s position in Birmingham was seriously hampered by the weakness of the Liberals, who captured 27,074 votes in the 5 seats they fought, which was just 10.6 per cent of the total. The Liberals best performance was in Kings Norton, where they secured 25.9 per cent of the vote, making this the only genuine three-cornered contest in the city. Not surprisingly this was the only minority vote that the Unionists secured, compared with 3 minority votes in the 1922 Election.(55)

The Birmingham Gazette described the city as “a black spot on the map of political progress”.(56) The Birmingham Post, on the other hand, proudly proclaimed that the city “has not wavered” and “remains true to its political faith”.(57) One newspaper contrasted the results with those in London, where Labour made substantial gains, commenting on “the really remarkable persistence and vehemence of what may most closely be described as Chamberlain party feeling in Birmingham”.(58)

Nevertheless Labour took some consolation from their defeats. The Town Crier, for instance, was able to claim that Labour “has given the Chamberlainites the biggest shock they have ever had in their lives”, pointing to the reduction in Neville Chamberlain’s majority in Ladywood and Austen Chamberlain’s in West Birmingham.(59) Indeed Neville Chamberlain secured the smallest majority in the Birmingham Divisions. The Daily Herald went so far as to claim that “the writing is on the wall” for Tory Birmingham.(60)



For the 1924 General Election Labour had candidates in all seats apart from West Birmingham, where Dr Robert Dunstan stood as a Communist.(61) Yet Labour resources in the city remained weak. Indeed the Party was so short of funds, that in Duddeston, Edgbaston, Erdington, Sparkbrook and Moseley they found difficulty in raising the £150 deposit in time for the nominations. Nevertheless there was comment in the Town Crier, that before the exposure of the Zinoviev Letter Labour had hoped to win the 4 seats of Ladywood, Yardley, Kings Norton and Deritend.(62)

Indeed Birmingham went against the national trend in the 1924 Election, with a swing to Labour in most seats. The Unionists' proportion of the vote remained virtually unchanged at 59 per cent, but the Liberals collapsed to less than 2 per cent of the total. Labour increased its overall vote by over 50 per cent from 77,386 in 1923 to 118,103 in 1924. In the 11 seats that the party contested, excluding the Communist poll in West Birmingham, Labour secured 39.6 per cent of the vote. Moreover they provided a shock for the Unionists, when Robert Dennison captured Kings Norton to become Birmingham's first elected Labour MP.(63) Meanwhile in Ladywood Neville Chamberlain found his majority cut to 77, whilst the Unionist majorities in Duddeston and Deritend were reduced to under 1,000.

Kings Norton was an outer suburb of Birmingham, containing the Austin car works at Longbridge. The seat was therefore less under the influence of the Unionist voting machine. Many of the voters would have moved into the area with the expansion of the Austin works during the First World War. Dennison gave three reasons for his victory. In the first place he had "the untiring efforts" of never less than 700 helpers. Secondly his predecessor, Herbert Austin, the founder of the Longbridge works, had a poor voting record in parliament. It was claimed that he took part in only one in three divisions. Finally Labour's repeal of the safeguarding duties, instead of weakening the motor industry, appeared to herald a period of expansion.(64)

Indeed there was a swing to Labour in all the working-class wards, whilst in middle-class Edgbaston and Moseley there was a swing to the Unionists. This split reflected the divisive nature of the national campaign, which Baldwin fought, seeking to frighten middle-class voters away from the Liberals with talk of Labour extremism. In fact there were few Liberal votes in the working-class wards for the Conservatives to squeeze. Overall in 1924 the Liberals could only secure around 5,000 votes from just three candidates, with two losing their deposits.



Baldwin's campaign of arousing the middle class against Labour may well have had the effect of sharpening working-class consciousness to the benefit of Labour. Furthermore the moderation of the Labour Government, when contrasted with the hysterical anti-Labour claims of the Unionist press may have helped the Party. Indeed the one candidate to perform badly against Unionist opposition was Dr Dunstan, standing as a Communist in West Birmingham, where there was a 9 per cent swing to Austen Chamberlain.

Another factor, which seemed to help Labour in the city, was the emergence of Oswald Mosley as a personality with wealth and charisma to stimulate the local party. Mosley came from an aristocratic background and his wife, Lady Cynthia, was the daughter of Lord Curzon. He had entered Parliament in 1918 as a Conservative but, having clashed with the leadership, he had fought the 1922 and 1923 Elections as an Independent. In March 1924 Mosley joined the Labour Party and the ILP. He was welcomed by MacDonald, who wanted to broaden the party's support, making it less dependent on the trade unions. His move to Birmingham was a deliberate challenge to Neville Chamberlain, whom he had fought in Parliament the previous year over the Rent Act, which had removed wartime controls. Even the presence of his wife, Lady Cynthia, in the city was said by the Birmingham Gazette to have "possibly attracted some thousands of votes to her husband".(65) Mosley's contest with Chamberlain ended in narrow defeat, although it was one factor in persuading the minister to seek a safer Birmingham seat for the future.

Mosley, who had developed good relations with the Clydeside leaders Maxton and Wheatley, had fought the campaign on the full ILP programme of nationalising railways, mines and banks.. He was particularly annoyed by the intervention of the Liberal, Bowkett, who had fought Edgbaston at the previous General Election. Mosley lost by 77 votes, after recounts, but Bowkett captured 539 votes. There was much talk of unfair play in the result as "the final figures given did not agree with the total votes counted".(66) Mosley later congratulated the Liberal Party on having retained the seat for Neville Chamberlain, saying "that this was the last function left to Liberalism in the world".(67)

The Labour advance was diagnosed by the Birmingham Post, which stressed the changing character of the city as a result of enlargement. "The old sense of community of interest has been weakened", it reported, whilst Unionists were too inclined "to rest on their oars between elections". The paper claimed that Labour's efforts and propaganda were untiring, but the Unionists "give relatively little time to the educational work, which counts for so much in the long run".(68) In fact the problem for



Labour in Birmingham was that they were too dependent on a fairly weak trade union movement. Individual membership remained low, which left the local party short of funds and relying for candidates either on trade union officials or rich men, such as Mosley. There was to be a similar situation in many of the Black Country constituencies.

## 2. THE LABOUR PARTY IN THE BLACK COUNTRY

### A. ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL BACKGROUND

By 1923 the Labour Party seemed well established in the Black Country, but as in Birmingham it was very dependent on the trade unions. The Annual Report gave all the constituency Labour parties in the region only the basic membership for 1923, paying affiliation fees of £1/10, which represented the minimum 180 members. The Black Country, however, did have four full time Party Agents, covering the constituencies of Smethwick, Wednesbury, West Bromwich and Wolverhampton West, but this was down from the six recorded in 1920.(69) The recession of 1921, coupled with various industrial defeats, meant that the party had had to fight hard to retain its 4 MPs in the 1922 General Election.

The minutes of the Wolverhampton Labour Party illustrate the precarious state of the movement's finances at this time. A Ward Council Meeting at the end of 1922 reported "poor attendance at meetings" and the need for "greater effort to raise funds locally".(70) The situation had not improved by February 1923, when the Executive decided to give the Agent "a written undertaking to cease holding the office... on May 18<sup>th</sup>, subject to the position being revised if the financial position warranted it".(71) In June 1923 the Executive Committee agreed to place finance first on the agenda at all their meetings. They resolved that due to "changed circumstances", they would be unable to assist the Labour Women's Council as before, although they would "give all the help we can".(72) In July the Committee agreed to appeal to the trade unions for funds.(73)

Meanwhile the local party was being embarrassed by internal splits. One particular incident occurred at a Town Council meeting, when Emma Sproson accused another Labour councillor, Allan Davies, of concealing the mismanagement of the Borough Fever Hospital.(74) The issue reflected the split in the local party between the ILP faction and the unions.(75) Sproson's case was that Davies was seeking to restrict access to the Fever Hospital by members of its sub committee.(76) When a motion was put, censuring Sproson for bringing the matter up in the Town Council without first reporting to the executive of the party, there was a 5:5 split in the vote.(77) The dispute eventually led to a revision in



the constitution of the Consultative Committee, which decided party policy on the Council. It was agreed that there should be majority decisions, which would be binding on all councillors.(78)

Unfortunately the new constitution did not stop another bitter dispute during 1924. On this occasion two local councillors, Allan Davies and J.E.Dederidge, defied the committee's wishes by voting for an increase in the Town Clerk's salary. The matter was made more serious because Davies was the party chairman, although he had recently stood down. A motion was drawn up censuring the two and requesting that they give an undertaking to observe the committee's decisions in future. As the two declined to give the undertaking, the motion was passed by 25 votes to 2..(79)

Davies and Dideridge later argued that they would carry out the committee's decisions as long as "they were in conformity with the principles and policy of the party as laid down or as had been previously agreed upon".(80) The local Executive Committee then voted that "the two cannot be considered as representing the party".(81) Eventually, however, with the prospect of municipal and parliamentary elections approaching, a reconciliation took place. As there had been no further acts of defiance by the two, the vote of censure was removed on 2<sup>nd</sup> October. At the same time a move to censure Emma Sproson, who had voted against the wishes of the committee over the filling of an aldermanic vacancy, was also dropped.(82)

In the November 1923 municipal elections Labour was no more successful in the Black Country than in Birmingham. The party gained one seat in Wolverhampton, but lost seats elsewhere. One each was lost in West Bromwich, Smethwick and Walsall, whilst the Conservatives gained the two Netherton seats in Dudley from Labour.(83) In West Bromwich there were only three contests with the local press complaining that the parties had apparently agreed "not to have any more elections than they can avoid".(84) Despite this Labour lost the fairly safe Greets Green seat to a Liberal, standing as an Independent. In Smethwick too the seat that Labour lost was that of party chairman, W.E.Lawrence, at Spon Lane.

The Conservative press was rather dismissive of Labour's chances in the 1923 General Election. With the Black Country still seriously affected by unemployment, it seemed likely that the Conservative policy of Protection would be a popular cause. Indeed The Times wrote of the probability of Unionist gains in Kingswinford, West Bromwich and Smethwick.(85) Conservatives thought that Protection would benefit the Black Country, since most of the industries in the region were geared to the domestic market. This made them vulnerable to imports, whilst not likely to suffer from reciprocal

action as with those that exported. On the other hand cheap imported raw materials were an advantage to some industries, especially those in metal working trades.

In fact the General Election brought no major changes in the 10 Black Country seats, although there was a swing away from the Conservatives to the advantage of both Labour and the Liberals. The Protectionist argument, which had swung votes to the Unionists in Birmingham, had never been quite so popular in the Black Country. Moreover there was less of the Chamberlain tradition of urban reform amongst Black Country Conservatives, with which to attract working-class voters from Labour.

In the 1924 General Election the Black Country followed the line of the working-class wards in Birmingham, providing an overall swing to Labour. The Party gained an extra seat at Bilston, whilst cutting Conservative majorities to under a thousand in Dudley and Wolverhampton West. The Conservatives were left with comfortable majorities only in Walsall and Stourbridge. They did capture Walsall from the Liberals but George Thorne held on to Wolverhampton East. It seems that the Conservatives' 'Red Scare' tactics of frightening Liberal voters had less effect in a working-class constituency like Wolverhampton East. In general, however, the Liberals performed as badly in the Black Country as in Birmingham and elsewhere in the country.

The Labour Party did not have everything its own way, however, as all the four Labour MPs experienced cuts in their majorities. Unemployment was still a major factor in the Black Country, whilst the Labour Party's record in office had been limited, although it widely used the excuse that it was a minority government. Moreover, distinctive issues such as the capital levy and nationalisation were no longer prominent in candidates' manifestos.

## **B. THE 1923 AND 1924 GENERAL ELECTIONS**

### **1. WEST BROMWICH**

In West Bromwich the election results of 1923 and 1924 showed no dramatic changes, although Frank Roberts, the Labour MP, experienced reduced majorities in both General Elections. In 1923 the Labour majority fell from 2,947 to 1,764, whilst Roberts's share of the vote fell from 50.6 per cent to 44.8 per cent. The swing, however, was not to the Conservatives but to Glyn Edwards, the Liberal candidate, who increased his vote by over 2,000. In 1924 Roberts's majority was down to 971, but this time he was in a straight contest with the Conservatives. The total Labour vote rose by over 2,000, giving Roberts 51.6 per cent of the total.



Unemployment was one of the dominant issues in both General Elections. The jobless total in West Bromwich was 3,597 in October 1923, which was down from a peak of 5,835 at the end of June 1921.(86) In 1924 the figure was still 3,408, which, according to the Birmingham Post, was an increase on the total for December 1923, when Labour came to power.(87) The industrial situation was described as “very serious” with 50 per cent of blast furnaces and 80 per cent of iron ore mines closed down. The iron industry in particular was said to be in “a disastrous condition” with many works having shut down in the previous 3 or 4 months. The Germans, it was claimed, were selling at 50 per cent below local prices.(88) Yet the town had a diverse range of metal industries, which, it could be argued, had shielded it from the worst effects of the recession. Some, such as spring manufacturing, were expanding with the motor car industry.(89)

In 1923 the Conservatives sought to make Protection and its likely impact on jobs in the constituency the big election issue. Speaking at Hill Top early in the contest, H.E.Parkes, the Conservative candidate, warned of the consequences of importing many thousands of tons of tubes:- “About 4,000 men had been kept out of employment in this country and a great many might have been employed in that immediate vicinity”. Belgium, he said, was sending 11,000 iron bars every month, which represented 2,400 to 2,600 jobs.(90) Two days later he reported that within the previous ten months 4,000 tons of foreign nuts and bolts had been dumped in this country, robbing “1,000 English nut and bolt makers of their work”.(91) Later in the campaign examples of dumped foreign goods were to be exhibited in a vacant shop in the High Street.(92)

West Bromwich had a strong pre-war Liberal tradition, which meant that Tariff Reform had never been as popular here as in Birmingham. Tariff Reform implied dear food, which was as powerful an argument in 1923 as in 1906. Roberts, himself, sought to exploit this. On the 29<sup>th</sup> November, for instance, the Birmingham Gazette reported a “remarkable meeting” held by Labour for women voters. “Extraordinary enthusiasm” was shown for Roberts, who stressed the impact of tariffs on the housewife’s bill.(93) When questioned by the Birmingham Post on his alternative to Protection for finding employment, Roberts replied with work schemes to provide “a national system of electrical power supply, transport developments, afforestation and waste land reclamation”.(94)

The Labour Party was more firmly established in West Bromwich than in Birmingham, although individual membership remained low.(95) The party was dependant on the local trade unions, who seem to have provided large support. When, for instance, in 1923 Austen Chamberlain attempted to

address a meeting of 5-6,000 in the old market place on the 4<sup>th</sup> December, he was shouted down and refused a hearing by Labour enthusiasts.(96) The Birmingham Post admitted that Roberts had secured a strong local following.(97) He also courted popularity by going out of his way in appealing to certain groups. In 1923, for instance, he made 'pensions for ex-servicemen' a big issue and addressed women only meetings.(98) By 1924 the opposition realised that Roberts was no extremist, describing him as having "a kindly ingratiating way with him, no pomposity, and an approachableness, which has brought him into the closest touch with the men and women of the meanest by-streets".(99) The local press reported that when he arrived at his High Street headquarters on the 28<sup>th</sup> October, he was "followed by thousands of people and youths" and "carried shoulder high to his office".(100) Roberts and the Labour Party, however, were not popular with everyone in West Bromwich, as the scenes at the Town Hall on the election night in 1924 indicate. Roberts claimed that for the first time he had been "publicly pelted in the streets of West Bromwich... and had had disgusting epithets used towards him".(101)

The Liberal vote was still a significant factor in West Bromwich. Indeed in the 1923 municipal elections, fighting as Independents, they retained two seats and captured Greet Green from Labour.(102) For these elections they appeared to be fighting in a pact with the Conservatives, who did not oppose them. In the General Election, however, their candidate, Glyn Edwards, was fighting on a Free Trade ticket, which would probably have helped Labour by taking votes from the Conservatives.

In 1924 the Liberals had no candidate, but the position of the local party was important. Tariff Reform was not meant to be an issue in this election, but many Liberals were said to be upset by a blatantly Protectionist speech given by Leo Amery on a visit to the town.(103) Nevertheless one Liberal councillor, J.J.Grant, came out in support of the Conservative, Captain Graham.(104) This was more than balanced, however, by the support for Labour given by Dr Hazel, the town's most prominent Liberal and the former MP, who claimed that "he would prefer the Red Flag to the Black Flag of Conservatism".(105)

Roberts was an MP, who closely followed the Labour Party line, concentrating mainly on social issues. Thus in 1923 the Birmingham Post reported Roberts promising "increased Old Age Pensions at an earlier age, adequate provision for widowed mothers, improved State aid for the blind, fuller compensation for injured workers, equality of opportunity in education and. ... relief for the taxpayer by a capital levy". The paper questioned how the war debt could be wiped out and "millions found to



finance these grandiose projects". They complained that Roberts was not eager to stress "the advantages of the levy" but preferred to steal the Liberals "Free Trade thunder".(106)

In 1924 Roberts was defending the record of the Labour Government, of which he was the Pensions Minister. He pointed out that they had raised unemployment pay, reduced food taxes and increased the number of old people on pensions. A further extension of pensions, he said, had not been possible due to the minority status of the Labour Government.(107) He defended the government's unemployment record by pointing out that it had fallen until August, whilst the rise thereafter had been due to the numbers coming on to benefit, who had not been entitled to it earlier in the year. Asked whether he stood for the Red Flag, Roberts replied that "he did not know the meaning behind that question, but .... he loved his country and would fight for it to the best of his ability".(108)

In both General Elections Roberts was opposed by strong Conservative candidates, who had links with the business community. In 1924, for instance, Captain Graham, put most emphasis in his campaign on unemployment and price inflation.(109) He seemed a popular candidate, who was reported as receiving "a rousing reception" in the Labour stronghold of Greets Green.(110) He was well backed by local business leaders with Roberts complaining of "near intimidation" at a Hill Top firm, which had put a Conservative leaflet in their employee's pay packet.(111)

After his victory in 1923 Roberts told the local press that opposition to Protection was the major factor behind his success. He also claimed that there was support for the capital levy, once it had been explained. He thought that the Conservatives had suffered from "doubtful tactics".(112) In 1924 the local press credited the Labour victory to their organisation and workers, who were said to be "imbued with a zeal that carries them wholeheartedly into their electioneering duties". Roberts himself admitted that the Russian question was a major issue, "capable of much distortion by my opponents", although he thought that it had not greatly influenced the local electorate.(113) In fact Roberts's support rested with the strong trade union element within the constituency, which was less likely to be shaken by 'Red Scare' tactics.

## 2 SMETHWICK

The Labour Party appeared to be on the defensive in Smethwick in both General Elections. The Conservatives had achieved some success here in the 1923 municipal elections, capturing a seat from Labour. Moreover as the constituency was close to Birmingham the Conservatives expected the



Protectionist cause to be strong here. Both contests were straight fights, as the local Liberal organisation was virtually non-existent. In 1923 the Labour MP, John Davison, increased his majority from 382 to 2,333. The local press, expecting the result to be “a near thing”, considered the size of the Labour majority “a great surprise”.(114) In 1924 Davison won again, but on this occasion the size of his majority was halved.

Unemployment was a major issue in both General Elections. In November 1923 the total was 5,326, whilst in October 1924 it was still high at 4,888, although these figures were well down on the peak of 9,058 for June 1921.(115) Indeed the high unemployment levels in the town were regarded by the Birmingham Post as “the worst in the country”.(116) In 1924 the newspaper again claimed that the town had been “hit as severely by the languishing of industry as any constituency in the country”.(117)

In 1923 the Conservative candidate, E.Brocklebank, a businessman, was said to be “an ardent adherent” of Tariff Reform, arguing that Free Trade had been found wanting after a fair trial.(118) In his election address Brocklebank pledged a tax on foreign manufactured goods, whilst ensuring “a full and free supply of raw materials”. He also pledged that he would vote against any food taxes.(119) Brocklebank was supported in a Unionist rally in the constituency by Neville Chamberlain, who argued that in the USA and Europe under a Protectionist system, “the workmen were fully employed and their wages were constantly rising, whereas ... men in this country were walking the streets, had nothing to do in some cases for two or three years and wages were falling even faster than the cost of living”.(120)

In 1924, however, the Conservatives had dropped Tariff Reform. Their candidate, Marshall Pike, who was described as “a shrewd, hard hitting speaker”, was something of a populist. Having left school at 13, he had worked in a locomotive depot before becoming a journalist and then being elected to the London County Council.(121) Pike was anxious to put the blame for unemployment in local industries on cheap imports from the continent. He blamed sweated labour in Belgium, where workers were said to work longer hours for lower wages, for undercutting both the local glass industry and the Birmingham Carriage and Wagon Co.(122) However, Pike avoided the Tariff Reform argument, talking instead of developing “closer bonds with the Empire” and of supporting “Government credit for British industry, where it was needed”, improved pensions and an earlier retirement age. The Labour Government, he said, had not introduced “a single new idea for dealing with unemployment”.(123)

Since tariffs were not an election issue, Pike sought support from local Liberals, who were working with the Conservatives in local politics to keep out Labour. The Conservatives hoped to attract their



support by emphasising the “menace of Socialism”. Thus a poster appeared, backed by four local Liberal councillors, appealing to their supporters to back Pike.(124)

Like West Bromwich the Smethwick Labour Party had few individual members and the trade unions dominated. The Birmingham Post described the town as “a great centre of trade unionism” with “more trade union organising secretaries here than in any other town in England” relative to its size.(125). John Davison was a popular local candidate, who in 1923 was prepared to fully support the Labour Manifesto, including the capital levy.(126) He answered the Protectionist case by arguing that iron and steel imports were at their highest in years of least unemployment like 1913 and 1920 and lowest in years of high unemployment like 1909 and 1922.(127)

In 1924 Davison’s popularity was such that his election meetings were said to have broken all attendance records with the candidate addressing “the biggest crowd in the history of the borough and three overflow meetings”.(128) Davison stressed the Labour Manifesto commitment to build more low cost houses and provide improved pensions. His main solution to unemployment, however, was to revive trade with Russia, which he saw as a source of cheap food and a market for exports.(129) His opponent was attacked as an outsider from London, who was a member of organisations favouring imperial unity.(130)

. Labour’s victories here owed much to Davison’s popularity, based on what the local paper called “the faithfulness with which he has represented the borough”.(131) In 1923 Labour’s case against Tariff Reform was helped by reports of a “flow of orders to local factories for the New Year”, which was bringing down unemployment in the constituency.(132) Indeed Smethwick with its engineering works and foundries saw its fortunes revive with the development of the motor industry. In 1924 the contest became more heated, especially as Pike appeared to be making some progress.(133). The “Red Scare”, however, appears to have played little part locally in the campaign, as it was fairly obvious that Davison was not an extremist.

### 3. WEDNESBURY

The Conservatives had high hopes of success in Wednesbury in both of these elections, due to the fact that Labour was defending majorities as low as 105 from the 1922 Election and 1,019 from 1923. In 1923 tariffs were to be the main issue, especially as much of the constituency was still affected by recession. Unemployment in the town of Wednesbury had dropped from a peak of 5,919 in July 1921

to 2,530 in November 1923, but the local iron industry remained depressed.(134) Meanwhile unemployment in Darlaston, which was part of the constituency, had fallen from 2,861 to 1,558 over a similar period.(135) A description of Wednesbury at this time came following a fleeting visit by Ramsay MacDonald in 1924, which was reported by the Manchester Guardian:- “Wolverhampton was cordial, but West Bromwich and Wednesbury, particularly Wednesbury, were delirious. Mr MacDonald in Wednesbury was the object of such a demonstration of affection as can rarely have fallen to his lot. Labour is in possession here all right. Of all the Black Country towns it is the unlovliest. It is set in a landscape of blackened works and slag heaps and presented today perspectives of squalid streets that Ancoats could hardly rival. Up from these streets had poured a multitude of people all too plainly bearing the marks of a crippled poverty. They swarmed in thousands around the centre of the town, waiting for the PM’s arrival.”(136)

In 1923 the contest was to be a repetition of that of 1922 with Short again being opposed by Herbert Williams. The Conservatives fought an openly Protectionist campaign with strong nationalist overtones. In Burnt Tree, for instance, Williams linked the German zeppelin bombing of Tipton with imports of their manufactured goods. At Dudley Port he linked the closure of local furnaces with imports of pig iron from Belgium, Germany and France.(137) Comparisons were also made with the motor industry, which was protected under the Safeguarding of Industries Act. At Tipton, for instance, he compared the Harper Beans motor works, which were “working day and night.... because the industry had protection” with the Roberts and Coopers furnaces, which were “out and black and in the place where iron was first puddled, not a single pig of iron was being produced, because there was not a single blast furnace in blast in the Wednesbury constituency”.(138) Williams warned voters not to believe “the lies that they were told by the Labour Party that food would be taxed”. On the contrary he claimed that Protection “would release the taxes on tea, sugar, meat and other food”.(139)

Williams was strongly backed by the local press, which published a letter from a Mr H.A.Davies, general manager of the Patent Shaft and Axletree Co. Ltd. He claimed that his company was running at a loss, whilst only the Conservative Party had the policy to assist the iron and steel industry. He urged that “in recording your vote in this Election...(voters should) consider carefully the facts as I have told them and the responsibilities you are incurring to yourselves, your wives and families”.(140)

Short responded with a letter of his own, claiming that Davies’s letter was “a deliberate act of intimidation, involving as it does the veiled threat that the various works of his Company will be closed



down". He questioned the Company's figures, pointing out that Mr Davies "knows that a tariff or any form of Protection will ruin the iron and steel trade for one half of the iron and steel production of the country is directly exported, half of the remainder is in the manufacturing of machinery, ships and various other articles which are exported".(141)

With no Liberal candidate Short sought to pick up their vote by stressing his own support for Free Trade, declaring that Protection was "a device to enforce the cost of the war upon the backs of those who had made too many sacrifices".(142) He also countered the claim that Protection was a remedy for unemployment by stating that "nearly 20,000 tons of nuts and bolts were exported", most of which would be lost if imports were stopped.(143) The Birmingham Post wrote of the misrepresentation of the Protectionist case in the constituency with "working women ...being frightened by stories of a dear loaf and of other increases in the cost of living".(144) The Birmingham Gazette, however, touched upon what was probably the decisive issue, when it wrote of "the instinctive dread of Protection among housewives, because of its effect on the cost of living".(145)

Short had won something of a reputation as a campaigning MP as his parliamentary record for 1923 shows. Among the issues that he took up in Parliament were the number of women not receiving unemployment benefit, the number of council houses erected since 1918 and grants from central Government for relief work.(146) Nevertheless the local press continued its attack on Short by producing a handbill, showing the amount of money which the MP received from the Boilermakers Society. They also printed a photograph of his London residence near Hyde Park.(147) The Birmingham Post complained that there was no mention of the capital levy in Short's election address, but at meetings he spoke of it as a tax on war wealth, which would reduce the National Debt.(148) Short, however, widened his campaign by stressing the need for better housing, sanitation and education.(149) He also successfully cultivated the not inconsiderable Irish vote in Wednesbury.(150) The result was to be a 1.3 per cent swing to Short, who increased his majority to 1,019.

In 1924 the Labour Party was again on the defensive, with Short not expected to be returned.(151) He was to base his campaign around the record of the Labour Government, emphasising the improvement in unemployment benefits and pensions. Any recent rise in unemployment was explained on the grounds that more people were entitled to benefits, whilst with an overall Labour majority the party would be able to deal more effectively with the problem.(152)

The Conservative candidate, Lampard Vachell, was appointed only two weeks before the start of the campaign. As a Cambridge graduate and lawyer, who had flown test aircraft during the war, he was seen as “practically a stranger to the constituency and its people”.(153) Although a supporter of Imperial Preference, he chose to base his campaign around the issue of the ‘Red Scare’, which he termed ‘Constitutionalism versus Socialism’.(154) This approach seemed to win over many local Liberals, who attended a meeting he addressed at Tipton, which was to end in uproar.(155) Vachell also denounced the Russian loan, claiming that the money “should be spent in England, alleviating our own people instead of Russian Bolsheviks”.(156) He warned that “Socialism had been put into practical form in Russia and after seven years of it, that country was in the throes of anarchy”.(157)

Short had much local support with the press complaining that “every evening a battalion of young folk have marched in procession singing the Red Flag”.(158) He complained of “foul bills” distributed by the Tories, who were trying to defeat him “by appeals to the prejudices of the people”.(159) Short defended the Russian loan, saying that it had been granted because the Soviet Government was prepared “to spend 75 per cent of it in this country to find work for some of our unemployed”.(160)

Short, whose majority was cut to 338 in a 1 per cent swing to the Conservatives, gave credit for his victory to his supporters in the town:- “Never did the Tory Party engage in a fight under more favourable conditions to themselves. The press has been against us, the employers have been against us, everybody has been against us. But you my friends have remained loyal”.(161) Vachell put his defeat down to the lack of time he had to fight the constituency.(162) The local press, however, blamed poor organisation compared with the Labour Party, whose workers “are imbued with a zeal that carries them wholeheartedly into their electioneering duties”.(163) With individual membership remaining at the basic level much of this support and organisation came through the trade unions.(164) Nevertheless such organisation was not evident in all the Black Country constituencies.

#### 4. KINGSWINFORD

The fourth Labour constituency of Kingswinford was another to be still badly affected by the recession. The Birmingham Post, for instance, interviewing a local, reported that “where once a score of furnaces were in full blast, now he doubted if there were three... He showed me two great empty ironworks with doors closed against the workers by the depression of trade”.(165) Chainmaking was



another major local industry, which was in serious distress, with exports down from 32-36,000 tons a year before the war to only 10,000. This was leaving 25-40 per cent of chainmakers unemployed.(166)

The Conservative candidate, Major H.Webb of Bewdley, made Tariff Reform the main issue in the 1923 Election, claiming that Free Trade had “left England high and dry on the shore”.(167) His father had been a previous holder of the seat, whilst he was the head of a seed manufacturing firm in Wordsley.(168) There was also a Liberal candidate, C.P.Blackwell, who attacked the capital levy and defended Free Trade. He claimed at Old Hill, for instance, that local manufacturers could buy iron from Belgium to make nuts, bolts and screws, which could then be sold more cheaply in Belgium.(169) The local press, however, accurately described the Liberal organisation in Kingswinford at this time as virtually non-existent.(170)

Sitch, the Labour MP, was furious at the intervention of a Liberal, declaring that he was the Free Trade candidate, why bring in another and that “the Liberals are here to fight Labour”.(171) In rejecting Protection, he asserted that “Free Trade is never more necessary than it is today”.(172) He argued that tariffs would not help the chainmakers, as there were few imports of chains.(173) Furthermore in the hollowware trade, which was recently safeguarded, employers were trying to reduce women’s wages by 6 shillings a week.(174)

Sitch claimed that “the real causes of unemployment were economic instability, the great inequalities in the distribution of wealth and the payment of low wages”. Sitch went on to explain that through its housing programme, Labour would find work for nearly half of the unemployed as well as providing justice for ex-servicemen. There would be proper educational facilities for the worker’s children and a minimum wage would be established for all trades. Sitch was not afraid to explain how the money would be raised to pay for the programme, declaring that there would be taxation of land values and a readjustment of the income tax. He also gave his support to the capital levy on wartime profits in order to reduce the National Debt.(175)

The case for Free Trade was backed by the Birmingham Gazette, which published a circular from Mr Ernest Stevens, the head of the largest hollowware manufacturing business in the constituency. In it he denied seeking to bring his business under the Safeguarding Act, adding that “Free Trade is the best policy for this country”.(176) Sitch was able to increase his majority to 4,312, which was the largest in the Black Country for this Election. Even the Birmingham Post accepted that he was “a popular personality apart from his politics”.(177)

In 1924 there was to be no Liberal candidate, leaving a straight contest between Short and Webb. The Conservatives hoped that their abandonment of Protectionism would persuade many Liberals to support them. Indeed leading Liberals were said to have signed the nomination papers of the Conservative candidate, Major Webb, a local businessman.(178) He was also backed by both the previous Liberal candidates, on the grounds that he stood for “Constitutionalism against Socialism”.(179)

However, Charlie Sitch, nicknamed ‘Our Charlie’, remained a popular local MP. The Birmingham Gazette reported him addressing meetings of 2,000 at Blackheath and over 1,000 at Cradley Heath and Quarry Bank, with hundreds unable to gain admission.(180) Webb, on the other hand, was forced to cancel meetings due to disorderliness and heckling.(181) Sitch fought his campaign around the improvements in pensions and unemployment pay, which the Labour Government had achieved, along with their promise to build new houses.(182) He claimed that the Conservatives were fighting a dirty campaign, quoting a pamphlet headed ‘Socialism’, which spoke of “murder, blasphemy, revolution, starvation, destruction and famine”.(183)

Sitch had his majority cut from over 4,000 to only just over 1,000. As in the other Labour held seats there was a swing to the Conservatives, although this could be accounted for here by the absence of a Liberal. Sitch claimed that the campaign was “one of the dirtiest elections that have ever been fought from the standpoint of the literature issued against the Labour Party throughout the country”. He put his success down to keeping his platform “free from personalities” and not resorting to “literature of a shady character”.(184) Sitch’s local popularity came through his work as a trade union official in the region. It was from here that all the enthusiastic electoral support came, as the local party, like those in the other Labour constituencies in the region, had no large individual membership.(185).

## 5. BILSTON

Labour was to gain its fifth seat in the region against the national trend, when in 1924 John Baker captured Bilston. The party’s victory here was based on its post-war successes in Urban District Council elections in Coseley, Sedgley and Bilston itself, although they did not maintain all their early gains during the recession years.(186) The constituency, which contained major iron and steel works, had seen its unemployment total drop from over 7,000 in 1921 to below 4,000 in 1923.(187) Nevertheless unemployment remained the main issue in both elections.



. In 1923 there was to be a three-way contest with Baker again challenging the Conservative MP, Howard Bury, along with a Liberal, Prentice. Bury, who was an active supporter of Protection and Empire Free Trade, promoted it as a way of solving unemployment and reducing taxation.(188) He pointed to “the vast quantities of Ruhr steel, waiting to be dumped into the country, if the Free Traders, Liberal or Labour, have their way”.(189) The programme was fully backed by the Hickman family, which had a powerful influence in the local Conservative Party, as well as in Alfred Hickman Ltd. the major steel company in the constituency.(190) Edward Hickman argued that the Liberals had no solution to unemployment, “while the two planks in the Labour platform were trade with Russia and the capital levy”.(191)

In the Express and Star, however, the Liberal candidate, Prentice, accused the company of sending out a scare circular. This reported unfair competition from French and Belgian steel imports and warned that conditions would worsen when the dispute in the Ruhr ended. The circular predicted that under Free Trade the company “would be obliged to close down everything except the skelp mill with the effect that instead of employing over 2,000 men, they would only be able to employ about 200”.(192)

Baker, himself, was a firm supporter of Free Trade, warning that tariffs created enmity between countries.(193) The presence of a Liberal, however, meant that the Free Trade vote was split, leaving the advantage with Howard Bury, who retained his seat with a majority of 1,101. The Conservative total vote was down by over 2,000, whilst their percentage fell from 54.2 per cent to a minority poll of 42.6 per cent. Labour also lost ground, but not by this much.

In 1924 Labour was to be helped here by the absence of a Liberal candidate, making the contest a straight fight with the Conservatives. The Conservative MP, Howard Bury, decided to fight the election on the issue of the Red Peril, distributing notices and leaflets to warn voters. One spoke of a choice between “the Union Jack or the Red Flag of Socialism”, whilst others warned of civil war and the Communist threat to women.(194) He also condemned the Russian loan and the removal of the McKenna duties, claiming that Labour had “great friends of everyone except their own countrymen and were out to benefit Russia and Germany and every other country at our expense”.(195)

The Labour candidate was again John Baker, who was reported to have “nursed the district continuously” and “established a strong Labour element”.(196) Baker defended the Russian loan as a means of stimulating British trade.(197) He also dealt with his opponent’s literature in a mature

manner, pointing out that there was a higher standard of morality amongst the workers than amongst the aristocracy.(198) With regard the economy Baker claimed that the removal of the Safeguarding duties had led to a significant drop in car prices, which had stimulated exports.(199)

On the eve of the poll the Birmingham Post admitted that Labour had made “considerable headway”. Much would depend on the 5,000 votes, which had gone to the Liberals at the previous election.(200) Later Baker was to acknowledge the number of Liberals, who had worked to secure his return. He claimed that literature sent out by the Conservatives to advise Liberals to vote Tory had been “resented by the rank and file” in the party. Baker also gave credit for his success to the Labour manifesto pledge to reduce the old age pension limit to 65 and to grant widows’ pensions.(201) Equally significant, however, was the improvement in the organisation of the local Labour Party. Baker, himself, praised the work of Sam Hague, the Labour leader and Manchester JP, who had moved into the division in the previous twelve months.(202) Under his leadership individual party membership was to increase over the next few years.(203)

## 6. WOLVERHAMPTON WEST

In Wolverhampton the Labour Party remained optimistic of success in the West division, despite the internal problems of the local party. In both General Elections there was to be a straight fight between the sitting Conservative MP, Sir Robert Bird, and Labour. In 1923 Labour had replaced Alexander Walkden, who had stood down in April, with W.J.Brown, General Secretary of the Civil Service Clerical Association. Brown was recommended by the Labour agent Dan Davies. With the local party strapped for cash he was impressed by the union’s agreement to pay £250 a year plus election expenses.(204)

Brown was born into a large working-class family in Battersea, from where he progressed as a scholarship boy to the Civil Service.(205) Here he set up the Boy Clerks’ Association, which he later formed into the Civil Service Clerical Association and affiliated it to the TUC. He became the union’s full time general secretary in 1919 and was also a member of the ILP.(206) At a Selection Conference, Brown faced two rivals, Emma Sproson and O.G.Willey, with Brown easily winning the vote.(207) Sproson later challenged the methods of the Selection Conference, claiming that delegates were not allowed to speak on the merits of the candidates.(208)



The election campaign quickly centred on the issue of tariffs. Wolverhampton was recovering from the recession more quickly than other Black Country towns, partly due to the growth of new industries such as motor cars, motor cycles, bicycles and electric light gear. Bird was quick to point out that the expansion was due to protection under the Safeguarding of Industries Act, which put a 33 per cent duty on imported motor cars. He went on to challenge Brown and the "Labour Socialist Party" whether they were in favour "of that duty, which has done so much to build up the prosperity of the motor industry and to secure employment for those engaged in the trade... during the last three years". Bird was publicly backed by the chairman of the Wolverhampton Engineering Employers' Union, who warned that if Safeguarding went "50 per cent of the firms would be compelled to discharge at least half of the workmen employed"(209)

For Bird Tariff Reform meant extending Safeguarding to other industries such as the tube trade, which he claimed was being flooded with low price imports, forcing wages down. He assured voters that food would come in free, whilst taxes on tea and sugar would be reduced. For those involved in industries like the edge tool trade, he claimed that with Protection, they would be in a strong position to bargain for concessions over tariffs.(210)

Yet Bird seems to have had some doubts about the policy. He claimed that he had "never been a convinced Free Trader or Protectionist" and was not "bound by the theoretical doctrines of either".(211) Aware of growing Labour strength in the constituency, Bird was anxious to retain Liberal support.(212) This accounts for the Party's decision not to oppose Thorne in East Wolverhampton. It also explains his announcement that Protection need not be permanent and that the present system could be restored in time, if circumstances warranted it.(213)

Brown responded to this campaign by stressing his support for Free Trade, asserting that "every vote for his opponent is a vote for higher prices and less work".(214) He showed little support for Safeguarding, even as it affected the car industry, and warned of the effects of a threatened tariff on imported steel.(215) The Birmingham Post accused Brown of "playing the Free Trade card for all it is worth in an endeavour to obtain Liberal support".(216) Indeed his stand assured him the support of a number of local Liberals, including Mr Price Lewis, a former candidate, but not that of George Thorne, the MP for the East division.(217)

Brown, however, declared that tariffs were a "distraction", leading to higher prices, whilst the real issues were "better housing" and "free education from infant school to the university".(218) The capital



levy was also defended by Brown, who claimed that only 330,000 people would be affected.(219) Moreover personal wealth had risen by £5 billion during the war.(220) The offer to debate the matter along with the question of tariffs was turned down by the Conservatives.(221) Brown also attacked Bird's voting record in parliament, which showed a high rate of absence.(222)

As the campaign heated up there was much rowdiness at Conservative meetings. Bird aggravated matters himself by his constant references to the 'Labour-Socialist Party' and calling the capital levy "a hideous menace", equating it with confiscations in Russia.(223) There were also deliberate Conservative distortions, such as their poster "depicting the hand of the Labour Party grabbing the goods of the poor".(224) The result was a narrow defeat for Brown with Bird winning by 241 votes, which was the smallest majority in the Black Country. Brown put his defeat down to "superior resources in the shape of cars and the influence of the out-voter".(225) The closeness of the result reflected the impact that Brown's campaign had had. Even the Birmingham Post described him as "an accomplished and persuasive speaker".(226)

Brown again stood for Labour in 1924, when he seemed to be helped by a reported drop of 2,270 in the numbers of unemployed in Wolverhampton over the previous year.(227) The Birmingham Post described the local party as "an efficient machine", which traditionally "played the moderate fiddle", with Brown, himself, "a persuasive candidate".(228) The candidate's policies already had a rather distinctive edge. They included pensions for widows, Free Trade, an 8-hour working day, equality of voting for women, a tax on land values and nationalisation of the coal industry.(229)

During the campaign Brown received a sympathetic letter from the former candidate, Walkden, warning him of what to expect from Bird:- "I doubt not that you are having to face a great deal of misrepresentation on the part of your political opponents, who are apparently so bankrupt of legitimate arguments with which to meet our case, that they seem to stop at nothing in their wild endeavours to discredit the excellent work which Labour has already accomplished".(230)

Bird started his campaign by attacking Labour's record in office, especially the level of unemployment and the Russian loan.(231) As in previous elections Bird was quick to equate the Labour Party with Socialist extremism. In this respect the publication of the Zinoviev letter during the campaign proved ideal for him to exploit. The Birmingham Post wrote:- "Sir Robert Bird's warnings of the dangers of the Socialist gospel, backed up by the hard facts of experience like unemployment, food



prices and the like, have entirely discredited the Labour Party in the eyes of reasonable people and now the dramatic exposure of the Red Moscow plot will most certainly convince all the waverers".(232)

Bird had earlier made clear his position on Tariff Reform, claiming that it was not an issue and, if it came before the Commons, he would not support it.(233) This statement enabled him to retain the support of Alderman Bantock, the prominent local Liberal, who was behind the municipal pact with the Conservatives. Bantock had already written to Bird giving him his support and agreeing to advise his Party members to do the same.(234) He now wrote an open letter to the Wolverhampton Liberals, urging them to vote for Bird:- "I am a Free Trader but the issue is not Free Trade versus Protection. It is rather sound constitutional advancement versus Socialism".(235) Brown also appealed for the Liberal vote, stating that "there was hardly anything in Thorne's election address with which he did not agree".(236) Labour, however, had upset local Liberals by standing a candidate against Thorne in the East division.

The campaign rapidly descended into personal attacks, with Brown complaining of comments made about him by Bird and his wife.(237) Meanwhile Brown attacked Bird's parliamentary lobby record, which showed 55 absences from 77 divisions.(238) The Conservatives, however, exploited an article written by Brown in a trade union periodical, in which he stated that the Labour Government's "biggest failure is in unemployment" and its "treatment of pledges has been deplorable".(239) Meanwhile, Bird found his meetings subject to "a good deal of disorder and personal abuse by Labour opponents".(240)

As the campaign drew to a close Brown told the press that he did not know of another election "where we have had to contend with such low down tactics".(241) Indeed Brown put his narrow defeat down to "a campaign of lies, bad weather and motor cars". Bird's explanation for his success, on the other hand, was "the ineptitude and incompetence of a Socialist Government".(242) Bird was undoubtedly helped, however, by the absence of a Liberal opponent, especially as he made clear his own opposition to Tariff Reform.

## 7. WOLVERHAMPTON EAST

With the growing demise of the Liberals after 1918 both of the other Parties must have hoped for success in Wolverhampton East. Yet Liberalism was to prove deeply rooted in this seat. In 1923 neither of the main parties decided to contest George Thorne's seat. For Labour financial factors were probably

the major reason, given the state of the Party in this division. Both Labour and Conservatives, however, preferred to concentrate on the West, hoping to win Liberal votes there by allowing Thorne a free run in the East..

In 1924, however, George Thorne was faced by two opponents, with Labour deciding on a last minute intervention. This caused some alarm amongst local Liberals, especially as it was recognised that whilst Labour lacked the machinery to win the seat, having forfeited their deposit in the 1922 Election, they could let in the Conservatives.(243) This was not something that would worry Labour too much, since it was the Party's intention nationally at this stage to squeeze out the Liberals.(244)

The Birmingham Post put Thorne's success over 16 years down to the fact that he had "always trimmed his sails to deal with the Labour winds from which he has gathered much carrying support in the past". Labour, it was claimed, "cannot hope to do other than make a moderate impression". With the Conservatives having dropped Tariff Reform the Birmingham Post thought it possible that they might "slip in Sir Thomas Strangman".(245)

The Labour candidate, R.H.Williams, was a railwayman and local councillor from Bala in North Wales. As a Calvinist lay preacher and a worker in the Brotherhood Movement, he was an immediate challenge to Thorne, who was a Nonconformist himself and gained much support from this section.(246) Williams also hoped to pick up votes from union members, such as the locksmiths and railwaymen, who had previously backed the Liberals.(247)

Thorne responded to this by claiming that he was "a Labour man himself as distinct from a Socialist".(248) His programme put emphasis on education, health and improved pensions, as well as stressing free trade and free enterprise.(249) Nevertheless he was prepared to exploit the Zinoviev Letter to isolate Labour, claiming that, although it might possibly be a forgery, "(it) has not increased the confidence of the electorate in Mr MacDonald on the Russian treaty".(250) Many local Liberals also called for "open retaliation" against the Labour candidates in the West Wolverhampton and Bilston divisions.(251) Brown must have felt the impact of this as he came out openly in agreement with Thorne's election address.(252)

Thorne's main threat, however, came from Captain Strangman, the Conservative candidate, who attacked the removal of the Safeguarding Duties for causing an increase in unemployment.(253) He called for trade links with the colonies rather than the Russian proposals. His party, however, was not



fighting a Protectionist campaign, so his warning of cheap steel imports from Belgium was less effective.(254)

The Birmingham Post claimed that Thorne was relying on “sentiment” to pull him through, as the electors were looking for an “industrial resurrection” under a Conservative Government.(255) Certainly Thorne put his victory by a majority of just over 1,000 down to “the loyalty and steadfastness” of friends and neighbours.(256) Labour again came third, which reflected their continued poor organisation in this division.

## 8. DUDLEY

Dudley was another Black Country town to have been badly affected by the recession. The unemployment total in 1923 stood at 5,000, which was considered “out of all proportion to the population” and “greatly in excess of most other industrial areas of a similar size”.(257) Moreover, unlike Smethwick and Wednesbury, the total was dropping only slowly from a figure of 6,483 posted on the 8 July 1921 during the peak of the recession.(258) This reflected the traditional nature of many of the town’s industries, which included coal, iron, brick making and limestone quarrying.(259)

The state of the iron industry in 1923 was said to be as bad as or worse than during the slump of the previous year. According to the Birmingham Post “many works (were) being dismantled or in liquidation ... due to unfair foreign competition”, leaving only three or four in the constituency.(260) The Conservative MP, Lloyd, was the head of the most important of these and was an enthusiastic Protectionist. He blamed the slump on unfair continental competition with bar iron being imported from Belgium, equivalent to £120,000 in wages in the Black Country. He pointed to the success of Harper, Son and Bean Ltd., which employed 3,000 in the region, 1,000 of them in Dudley, which was being helped by a 33 per cent tariff.(261)

At first it seemed that Labour would not stand in the 1923 Election. The Birmingham Post reported that their funds “were greatly depleted by the last contest, in which their candidate sustained a heavy defeat”.(262) Furthermore Labour had also lost two seats in the municipal elections in their Netherton stronghold. This was followed by a by-election defeat in another stronghold, St. Thomas’s Ward.(263) The fact that Labour seemed unlikely to stand encouraged the Liberals. They selected Councillor F.J.Ballard, a strong local personality, who had always taken an active interest in the town’s affairs. He argued that tariffs meant higher prices, increasing the wealth of the wealthy, whilst providing “a poorer

breakfast table for the toiler".(264) To illustrate their point the Liberals used the traditional "big and little loaf" posters.(265) Ballard proved to be a popular candidate with reports of him being "carried shoulder high" after one meeting.(266) Following the surprise victory of Pat Collins in Walsall in 1922, the Liberals in Dudley had high hopes of emulating him

Initially Ballard appealed for Labour support, inviting the Party "to come forward and help me as far as they can... we know that about 80 per cent of the Labour Party are good old Liberals".(267) Unfortunately for Ballard Labour did provide a late candidate in R.F.Smith, who was also an "out and out Free Trader", whilst stressing his working-class origins.(268) Ballard was upset by the Labour intervention, asserting that "there never ought to have been a three-cornered fight in Dudley" and pointing out that he would not have stood had Labour been in the field earlier.(269) He also made an appeal for the working-class vote by opposing the decontrol of housing rents and supporting the extension of Old Age Pensions by removing the thrift disqualification.(270)

Smith's election address avoided mention of the capital levy, which was under attack from both his rivals. Instead he stressed the importance of the international situation with the need for peace, revision of the Peace Treaties, an effective League of Nations and a resumption of economic and diplomatic relations with Russia.(271) Smith was also to be a victim of a campaign of rumours, explaining, for instance, that he had not been a conscientious objector during the war, but had served in the Ministry of Munitions, where he was exempted from military service.(272)

The result was a narrow victory for Lloyd over Ballard, with the Labour candidate coming a poor third. Ballard partly blamed his defeat on the Labour intervention and partly on the poor organisation of the Liberal Party, which a three-week campaign could not repair.(273) The result, however, was a bigger disaster for Labour, despite having won a by-election here two years before. Smith lost over 6,500 votes on the 1922 result, securing less than 10 per cent of the poll and losing his deposit. The main achievement of the Labour intervention seems to have been to prevent the Liberals from winning, which suited national party policy at this time.

Smith put his defeat down to the weakness of the trade union movement in the town.(274) At the same time the Dudley Labour Party had only the minimum individual membership.(275) Smith was also critical of the Labour organisation, saying that after being in Dudley a few days "he found a condition of affairs different from what he had been accustomed to finding in other parts of the country". He thought that the election would give the local party "the opportunity to purge itself of the



undesirables". He warned that "there had not been sufficient spadework and they would have to start and build up their movement".(276)

The Labour Party was to perform much better in Dudley in the 1924 Election. A major reason for this was the appointment of Oliver Baldwin, the son of the Conservative leader as their candidate. His selection reflected the desperate state of the party following their drubbing in the 1923 Election. Baldwin, who was only 25, had already experienced an adventurous wartime career in the army in both Russia and Turkey. After his return he had written a play and a novel.(277) As regards his political views Baldwin was described as a Social Democrat "belonging to the school founded by William Morris and Mr H.M.Hyndman".(278)

Baldwin quickly became a popular candidate, who since his adoption in July, was said to have "sedulously nursed" the constituency, visiting and making himself known in all parts, especially the slum areas.(279) He was particularly appalled by the "horrible housing conditions" that existed in many parts of the town, declaring "how iniquitous the present system was that committed a great mass of the people ... to live in wretched surroundings".(280) Baldwin was outspoken on other social matters, pointing to Dudley's lack of educational opportunities. The Tory Party, he said, was "afraid of education", having increased class sizes and school fees, whilst reducing State scholarships when they were in power. This was a policy, which, he claimed, had been reversed by the Labour Government.(281) His visits to the town's slum areas further raised his popularity and alarmed the Conservatives. The Birmingham Post reported that "most of his meetings have been so crowded that large numbers have been unable to gain admission". This was put down to the glamour of being the son of an ex-Premier and to his courageous war record.(282) Along with Baldwin's popularity Labour had another advantage as some effort appears to have been made to increase individual party membership, which, according to the Annual Report, rose to 400 in 1924.(283)

Lloyd was frustrated in his campaign for Tariff Reform by the Conservative's change of policy on this, but he maintained his support for the restoration of Safeguarding as a solution to unemployment. Oliver Baldwin described this as "Tariff Reform in sheep's clothing".(284) On the other hand, sensing a close contest, Lloyd was prepared to exploit the Zinoviev letter, claiming that the Labour Government had failed to stop Russian propaganda and that some trade unions had received money from Moscow.(285)

The Liberals, who had run the Conservatives a close race in 1923, were not standing this time. In the 1921 by election they were believed to have supported Labour, whilst in the 1922 Election it was the Conservatives. This time Labour sought to win them over by showing that their aims were similar to theirs on issues such as the nationalisation of mineral rights, taxation of land values and governmental electric schemes.(286) Nevertheless the press reported a number of prominent Liberals coming out in support of Lloyd, claiming that it was in response to the much publicised Socialist threat.(287)

The result was a cut in the Conservative majority to under a thousand. Lloyd gave the reason for his victory “the threat of a Socialist majority to prosperity”, whilst Baldwin put his defeat down to “the weight of motor cars and the fact that the Liberal vote to a large extent was against”. This, he claimed, was frightened “by ‘bogeys’ of a kind that should not have disturbed a party claiming to be progressive”.(288) Nevertheless Baldwin could claim a moral victory, having increased the Labour vote from under 2,000 to over 10,000. He pointed out that at the start of the campaign “they had only £10 and yet they had got 10,000 votes”. He recommended improvements in the local party’s organisation, such as setting up a Labour club, “similar to what they had got in Wednesbury”.(289)

## 9. WALSALL

Walsall was another town whose unemployment remained stubbornly high. The figure for October 1923 was 6,060, which was about 30 per cent less than the peak figure in 1921.(290) One major reason for this was the town’s dependence on the leather trade and the horse. Its main industries were listed as “saddlers and coach ironmongery, buckles, chairs, curbs, bits and stirrups, bridles, saddles, harnesses, collars and all the necessary trappings for horses and carriages”. The town also had iron and brass foundries, but even these trades were in recession.(291)

Collins, the Liberal MP, was well prepared for this contest, sending out an appeal to each household, pointing out the consequences of Tariff Reform. He reckoned that 24 shillings would be needed to pay for articles now worth £1.(292) He was actively supported by Dan Cartwright, the Bloxwich miner’s agent and Labour councillor for that ward.(293) Cartwright had broken away from F.J.Dean of the Pelsall and District Miners’ Association and formed his own separate union.(294) It was such action that typified the divisions within the Walsall Labour Party.

The Conservatives eventually chose a working-class candidate, S.K.Lewis, to contest the seat. He had started work at the age of 12, running errands in a Walsall office, although he was now the chief



clerk and cashier of the South Staffs. Tramway Co. Collins accused him of misleadingly calling himself “a Conservative Labour man”.(295) Indeed Lewis was lauded as having “graduated in the hard school of toil”, which was seen as an advantage in this constituency. He was another forthright supporter of Tariff Reform, as a solution to unemployment, which secured him the endorsement of the former MP, Sir Richard Cooper, who claimed in a letter that Protection was “the one hope of salvation for our people”.(296) When asked why he was not standing on a working man’s platform, he replied that “it is not a Labour Party today, but a Socialist Party and I refuse to ally myself with those who are friends of Russia”.(297)

The Labour candidate, Dr. Arthur Osburn, who had a distinguished medico military career, was appointed from HQ as the Walsall Labour Party lacked the finances for a local candidate.(298) Indeed during the campaign itself representatives were sent to London to secure financial assistance and Osburn, himself, had to dip into his own pocket.(299) He was described in The Times as a “gentleman... having few qualifications to fight for Labour”.(300) In his election manifesto Osburn gave his full backing to the capital levy and the resumption of trade with Russia. He also stood “wholeheartedly” behind Free Trade, a government spending programme on schemes of housing, afforestation and transport but no mention of nationalisation. He did, however, stress the need for better pensions, improved housing, the nationalisation of the drinks trade and full adult suffrage.(301) Yet Osburn’s position was hopeless, especially given the state of the local party. Hecklers argued that he was splitting the Free Trade vote.(302)

The Times predicted a Conservative gain, but the press again underestimated Collins.(303) He increased his majority to over 2,000 with Osburn coming a poor third. Collins owed his success partly to his local popularity and partly to his Free Trade stand. The Labour vote fell by nearly 2,000, with their proportion of the poll falling from 23.6 per cent to 18.7 per cent. In the 1918 General Election Labour had secured 30 per cent of the vote. These figures show that there was nothing inevitable about Labour’s rise during these years.

Pat Collins’s successes in Walsall had been due partly to personality and partly to the ‘dear food’ campaign, which he directed against the Conservatives. For the 1924 Election this argument was now less effective, as Tariff Reform had been abandoned by the Conservatives, whilst it was claimed that food prices had risen under Labour.(304) It meant that it was possible for the Liberal vote to be successfully squeezed by the other two parties to the advantage of the Conservatives.



The Conservatives had chosen as their candidate a popular local personality, 'Billy' Preston, a businessman and secretary of the Walsall Party. The fact that he was a local man was a key part of his campaign, although he had little active experience even of local government.(305) His motto, 'The Empire as against Socialism', indicated the nature of his policies, arguing that the electors had to decide between "a government of Socialists backed by foreigners or (one) consisting of true British men". At the same time he vigorously denied any support for Protection, claiming that if elected to Parliament he would never vote for food taxes.(306)

The Labour candidate was Captain Lothian Small, the son of a miners' agent from Lanarkshire, who had served with the South Staffordshire Regiment during the war and with the League of Nations afterwards. The Birmingham Post described him as "one of the best type of Labour candidates".(307) He defended the government's unemployment record, claiming that it was "a colossal lie to declare that unemployment today was greater than when Labour took office". The Labour Government, he said, had increased benefits, whilst including people on short time in the statistics for the first time.(308) Small received little support, however, from the Walsall Observer, which proclaimed that the issue was one of "Constitutionalism versus Socialism", with "the Socialists determined to get the mastery". It is "the business, nay the duty of Liberals and Conservatives alike to prevent them" was their advice.(309)

All three parties considered Walsall a key electoral seat with visits from MacDonald, Lloyd George and Neville Chamberlain. Collins made a big appeal for the working-class vote, especially the miners, warning them that to vote Labour would let in the Tories.(310) Nevertheless this appeared to be what happened, as Preston captured the seat with a majority of over two and a half thousand. Small, meanwhile, increased the Labour poll by over 3,000 from 7,000 to over 10,000, although remaining in third place.

Collins blamed the size of the Labour vote for his defeat, claiming that his Party was "betrayed", being "caught between reaction on the one hand and extremism on the other".(311) Small, however, blamed lack of money and his late start to the campaign for his defeat.(312) The Walsall Observer remained critical of Small, claiming that he was "not quite the type to win popularity" and adding that "he has something to learn... both in the character of his addresses and in the handling of his own supporters and those opposed to his political creed".(313)



## 10. STOURBRIDGE

The Stourbridge constituency was another to have retained a strong Liberal base, although the Conservatives had captured the seat in 1922. Unemployment was also a major problem in some industries in the constituency, with 60 per cent of workers in the glass trade said to be unemployed.(314) Overall, however, the unemployment figures for Stourbridge and Brierley Hill showed a decline from 8,279 in May 1921 to 4,040 in October 1923.(315)

Douglas Pielou, the MP, was another Protectionist, although he made clear his opposition to food taxes.(316) In the 1923 General Election the Conservatives hoped to use this issue to convince the electorate that it would reduce unemployment. The case had powerful backing from local businessmen. A letter was publicised from the chairman of Somers and Co. of Haywood Forge in Halesowen, claiming that his workforce of 200 could be doubled, if the Unionists were returned to power.(317) Further support came from hollowware manufacturers, who reckoned that an extra 500 workers could be employed at Everson Brothers in Lye and another 350 at James Grove and Son Ltd. in Halesowen, "if Baldwin's Protection becomes operative".(318) Pielou could even claim the support of the local glass manufacturer, K.M.Chance, who although a Free Trader, was convinced that the dangers of Protection were "grossly exaggerated".(319)

The contest was to prove a genuine three-cornered one with the Liberals still seen as the main opposition. Yet with the defeat of their longstanding MP at the previous election, they were less certain of success. This was particularly evident given that Labour had a strong candidate in Wilfred Wellock.. A member of the ILP from Nelson in Lancashire, he called himself a Christian Communist. As a minister in the Independent Methodist Church he had been a leading pacifist during the war, being a prominent member of the No Conscription Fellowship. Since then he had founded the 'No More War Movement'.(320)

Wellock's solution to unemployment was to call for the eventual nationalisation of raw materials and industry.(321) According to the Birmingham Gazette his views were well received at an open-air meeting of the unemployed in Stourbridge, whilst it was also claimed that he was "getting good backing from the railwaymen".(322) Wellock also spoke out in favour of the capital levy, claiming that the only alternative was "increased taxation on the people".(323) However, after sending out 300 invitations to business leaders to discuss the matter only 6 turned up at a meeting addressed by the candidate.(324)

The result was a victory for Pielou by 1,500 votes from the Liberals. Despite his efforts Wellock came third with nearly 25 per cent of the vote, but this was still below the percentage secured by Mary MacArthur in 1918. The Conservative vote was also down on the 1922 result, but with the opposition split they were able hold the seat.

There was another three-cornered contest in 1924 with Labour once again selecting the popular Wilfred Wellock. Since the previous General Election his presence in the constituency had led to a steady increase in party membership.(325) However, Wellock's membership of the ILP and his record as a conscientious objector during the war made him vulnerable to Conservative attacks. He was, for instance, described as a "fervent" supporter of the Russian Treaty, who "spoke lightly" of the Campbell case.(326) Wellock, himself, defended the Russian Treaty, claiming that there were "misconceptions and misunderstandings about it".(327) He was also able to make much publicity out of a £50 cheque donated by W.A. Albright, the Oldbury chemical manufacturer, who had broken with the Liberals over their attack on the Russian Treaty.(328)

The Liberals chose Geoffrey Mander, a Wolverhampton solicitor, as their candidate, but the other two parties were squeezing their vote. Douglas Pielou, the successful Conservative candidate of the previous two elections was a big champion of the cause of ex-servicemen, having been crippled himself by his war injuries.(329) Pielou put his main emphasis on "the Safeguarding of industries", claiming that with the removal of the McKenna duties "imports of musical instruments, clocks, watches, motor cars and motor cycles had increased".(330) He was backed by the Birmingham Post, which reported of "truck loads of Belgian goods... unloaded, while local works stood idle" and of Belgian horseshoes being imported at £7 a ton, "less than the cost of raw materials in Lye". Pielou also attacked the Russian loan, saying that the money would have been "much better utilised in relieving hardship and misery in this country".(331)

Wellock increased the Labour vote by over 50 per cent, but this still left him 1,900 behind the victor, Pielou. He blamed the "scandalous stunt of the Red Plot" for his defeat.(332) The real losers, however, were again the Liberals, who finished in third place with their vote down by 3,000.

## C CONCLUSION

In the 1923 General Election the total Labour vote in the Black Country of 102,293 represented a fall of 2,500 on the 1922 figure. In both elections nine seats were fought, so that Labour's proportion of the



poll in contested seats dropped from 41 per cent to 37.8 per cent.(333) This compares with a national swing to Labour of 1.3 per cent from 29.4 per cent to 30.7 per cent. The Conservative share of the vote fell too in the Black Country, dropping from 47.8 per cent in the 1922 Election to 42.7 per cent. The party to benefit most from this was the Liberals, who despite the absence of an election in Wolverhampton East increased their overall share of the vote from 15.8 per cent to 19.5 per cent. In the six seats they contested, however, the proportion was 29.4 per cent. In Birmingham, on the other hand, Liberalism remained weak, enabling Labour to increase its share of the poll in contested seats from 36% to 37%, in spite of the Conservative's Protectionist campaign.

Another way of checking Labour's performance is by comparing results in similar seats. There were, for instance, three seats where there was a Labour v Conservative clash in both elections.(334) In 1922 in these seats Labour won 48.8 per cent of the vote and the Conservatives 51.2 per cent, whilst in 1923 the ratio was Labour with 51.7 per cent and the Conservatives with 48.3 per cent. This swing to Labour of 2.9 per cent compares with a national swing in such seats of 5.2 per cent with 6 per cent in borough seats.(335) In the two seats where all three Parties fought both elections, Labour won 35.2 per cent, the Conservatives 38.8 per cent and the Liberals 26 per cent in 1922.(336) In 1923, however, Labour won only 30.1 per cent whilst the Conservatives won 38.2 per cent and the Liberals 31.7 per cent. Thus there was a 5.1 per cent swing away from Labour and a 5.7 per cent swing to the Liberals, compared nationally with a swing of 0.8 per cent to Labour, 4.1 per cent to the Liberals and 5.5 per cent away from the Conservatives.(337)

It is apparent from these figures that, although Labour maintained much of its support in the Black Country, there was to be no increase as happened nationally in 1923. One factor was the revival of Liberalism, which accounted for Labour's third place in Dudley, Walsall and Stourbridge, as well as their failure to contest the seat of Wolverhampton East. The Liberal revival owed much to the issues of Free Trade and cheap food. At the same time the attraction of Protection as a solution to unemployment seems less evident here than in Birmingham. Thus although the Conservative vote remained strong, there was in fact a swing against them.

In 1924 it appears that, as in the working class wards in Birmingham, the Labour Party did better in the Black Country than in Britain as a whole. They now held 5 of the 10 seats, with their total vote rising from 102,293 in 9 contests in 1923 to 137,998 in 10. Moreover their share of the vote rose from 37.8 per cent to 43.3 per cent, which was above the national swing of 2.6 per cent. The Conservatives,

who now held only 4 of the seats, secured 45.6 per cent compared with 42.7 per cent in 1923, which was considerably less than the 8.8 per cent national swing. On the other hand the Liberals' overall share of the vote fell from 15.8 per cent to 10.8 per cent, but they contested only three seats and did retain Wolverhampton East..

In directly comparable seats there were the same three contests in which Labour fought the Conservatives in both elections as well as in 1922. Here there was no Liberal candidate to squeeze. In 1924 Labour won 50.4 per cent of the vote, compared with 51.7 per cent in 1923 and 48.8 per cent in 1922. Nationally in such seats there was a swing of 4.5 per cent to the Conservatives between 1923 and 1924.(338)

From these figures it is apparent that the Labour vote in the Black Country was not significantly affected by the Conservative's Red Scare campaign. The reason for this must rest with the fact that there were few middle-class Liberal or Labour voters to be frightened by the Conservative's campaign. In fact the Labour vote here was very much a working-class vote, closely linked to the trade unions. The party had also become well known and represented locally, making it less easy for the electorate to be scared. Furthermore in office the Labour Government had proved its competence over the economy and given modest help to the unemployed and pensioners.

Nevertheless it is apparent from these two General Elections that the Labour Party had not greatly expanded its support amongst the working class electorate of the Black Country. The party was not helped by poor organisation in many constituencies. In Dudley, for instance, Labour seemed demoralised after their 1922 defeat, which had so quickly followed their by-election success of 1921. In Wolverhampton East the party had only recently been organised and was to remain weak throughout the inter-war period. Meanwhile in Walsall Labour continued with its reputation for division and disunity with some members actually backing the Liberals.

With its low individual membership the Labour Party in the Black Country still remained very dependent on the trade unions. In 1918 the party had emerged at a time of full employment on the back of an expanding trade union movement. By 1923-4 the unions were badly hit by the recession and a series of unsuccessful strikes. As trade union membership dropped, so their affiliation fees to Labour were hit, leaving local parties with declining resources. This was not offset by any rise in individual membership, which remained at low levels in all constituencies. This was because non-unionised members of the working class were less likely to join or even vote for Labour than their unionised



colleagues. Labour benefited from this in 1924, as the General Election was seen as a Conservative attack on the working class and their institutions. On the other hand its close association with the trade unions made it difficult for Labour to expand further in the Black Country at this time. It meant, for instance, that local parties without a mass membership were being run by small cliques, who often spent much time squabbling, as can be seen in the case of the Wolverhampton and Walsall parties. By 1924 Labour had become well established in the region, but was finding it more difficult to expand beyond its basic support, especially amongst the non-unionised members of the working class.

## FOOTNOTES

- 1 Labour Party Annual Report 1923, p.45.
- 2 Affiliated trade union membership rose from 3 million in 1919 to 3.5 million in 1920 and 4.4 million in 1921. It then dropped to 4 million in 1922, 3.3 million in 1923 and 3.2 million in 1924. Labour Party income rose from £25,537 in 1919 to £37,866 in 1920, £54,523 in 1921 and £61, 178 in 1922. It then dropped to £51,721 in 1923, before recovering to £57,159 in 1924. Labour Party Annual Report 1925, p.191.
- 3 Baldwin's decision to call an election in 1923 has been open to many interpretations. A.J.P. Taylor (1963), P207, for instance, sticks to "the simplest explanation", that as a steel manufacturer he wanted to protect the home market. Pugh, M. (1993), p.225 promotes the alternative view, that the decision had more to do with reuniting the Conservative Party than with economics. Baldwin's most recent biographer suggests that his aim was "to establish his own authority, restore impetus and suggest to the working classes that Conservatism offered a constructive and 'national', classless, alternative to socialism". Williamson, P. (1999), p.29.
- 4 Cook, C. The Age of Alignment (1975), pp.123-4.
- 5 Ibid., P141.
- 6 The Economist, 17 November 1923. Quoted in Cook, C. The Age of Alignment (1975), p.141.
- 7 Cook, C. The Age of Alignment (1975), pp.123-4 and p.149.
- 8 Ibid., p.143.
- 9 Ibid., p.146.
- 10 Marquand, D. Ramsay MacDonald (1977), p.288.

- 31 Ibid., p.280.
- 32 Mowat, C.L. (1955), p.187.
- 33 The total Labour vote rose by 1,139,241. Even in the 64 seats that Labour lost the total Labour vote rose by 97,871. In only 12 of these cases was the Labour vote down. Labour Party Annual Report 1925, p.5.
- 34 Cook, C. The Age of Alignment (1975), pp.312-4. Labour had 37 seats in London and Greater London in 1923, but only 26 in 1924. In Scotland the number of Labour seats fell from 34 to 26. Labour increased their seats from 14 to 16 in the North East and from 23 to 24 in Yorkshire. In the West Midlands Labour remained on 11 seats. Cole, G.D.H. (1948), pp.153-5 and 170-1.
- 35 Labour Party Annual Report 1925, p.5.
- 36 Cook, C. The Age of Alignment (1975), p.318. There were 240 three, four and five cornered contests in 1924 and 265 straight fights.
- 37 McKibbin, R. Class and Conventional Wisdom. The Conservative Party and the Public in Inter War Britain in McKibbin, R. The Ideologies of Class, (1990), p.260.
- 38 Cook, C. The Age of Alignment (1975), pp.315-6.
- 39 Ibid., p.317.
- 40 Labour Party Annual Report 1925, p.6.
- 41 Cook wrote that the Zinoviev letter “probably accentuated existing trends” and “might have hit the Liberals more than Labour”. Cook, C. The Age of Alignment (1975), p.329.
- 42 Williamson, P. Stanley Baldwin (1999).
- 43 Ibid., pp.321-5.
- 44 Unemployment in October 1922 had been 42,175, whilst the peak of June 1921 had been 93,019. Midland Chronicle, 9 November 1923.
- 45 Labour Party Annual Report 1923, p.162. Divisions listed as contributing £1/10 were Deritend, Duddeston, Erdington, Kings Norton, Moseley, Sparkbrook and West Birmingham.
- 46 Cook, C. ‘Liberals, Labour and Local Elections’ (1975), p.169.
- 47 Birmingham Gazette, 2 November 1923.
- 48 “Even the gods cannot help those who will not help themselves, and it would appear that there are still many thousands of electors in Birmingham, who prefer to allow themselves and their dependants to sink deeper into the abyss of poverty and degradation rather than take the trouble to



walk a few yards to the polling station once a year and vote for the only party, which is fighting against poverty and degradation". Town Crier, 9 November 1923.

49 In one ward the Town Crier stated "the Labour Party started the election campaign with a debt of several pounds and had to borrow a few pounds to cover the initial expenses". Ibid.

50 Birmingham Post, 27 November 1923.

51 Birmingham Gazette, 5 December 1923.

52 Town Crier, 14 December 1923.

53 In its survey of the city The Times reckoned that the Unionists might be vulnerable in Aston, where Sir Edward Cecil was opposed by two well-known local men. The Labour candidate was Percival Bower, who was to become Birmingham's first Labour mayor. Bower was considered an extremist because of his "profound belief in the capital levy as a panacea for all present ills". As it happened the Unionist majority was virtually unchanged at 5,750. The Times, 4 December 1923.

54 Labour stood in 8 of the 12 Birmingham seats in 1922 and in 9 in 1923. In 1922 Unionists were unopposed in Edgbaston, Erdington and Moseley, whilst an Independent stood against them in Handsworth. In 1923 Unionists were unopposed in Handsworth, whilst Liberals opposed them in Moseley and Edgbaston. See Appendices Tables C and D.

55 Kings Norton was the only seat, which had a minority Unionist vote in both elections. In 1922 there was a minority vote in Deritend and Sparkbrook. See Appendices Table C.

56 Birmingham Gazette, 8 December 1923.

57 Birmingham Post, 8 December 1923.

58 Town Crier, 14 December 1923. Austen Chamberlain's majority in Ladywood fell from 6,833 in 1918, to 2,443 in 1922 to 1,554 in 1923. See Appendices Table C.

59 Ibid., quoting from the Daily Herald.

60 Ibid., quoting from the Manchester Guardian.

61 Dunstan had stood for Labour in Ladywood in both the 1922 and the 1923 General Elections. See Appendices Table C.

62 Town Crier, 31 October 1924.

63 Appendices Tables C and D. Dennison was a Scot, who was assistant secretary of the Iron and Steel Trades Confederation. For a full account of the campaign see A.J.Bullock 'The Progress of

the Labour Party in Birmingham 1918-24'. M.A. Thesis, University of Wolverhampton. (1994), pp.36-40.

64 Town Crier, 31 October 1924.

65 Birmingham Gazette, 31 October 1924.

66 Town Crier, 31 October 1924.

67 Birmingham Post, 31 October 1924.

68 Ibid.

69 The four agents were R.A.Baker (Smethwick), W.Darby (Wednesbury), A.Guest (West Bromwich) and D.Davies (Wolverhampton West). Labour Party Annual Report 1924, p.218.

70 Wolverhampton Labour Party Minutes, Ward Council Meeting, 31 December 1922.

71 Ibid., Executive Committee Meeting, 18 February 1923. Extra funds must have been found as Davies survived as Party Agent.

72 Ibid., Executive Committee Meeting, 5 June 1923.

73 Ibid., Executive Committee Meeting, 3 July 1923.

74 Wolverhampton Express and Star, 14 May 1923.

75 Sproson was a leading figure in the local ILP, whilst Davies was a railwayman and a member of ASLEF. See Jones, G.(1969), p.167.

76 The ILP moved a resolution protesting against Councillor A.Davies's action on the fever hospital sub committee, where he was trying to prevent members of that committee from making unannounced visits to the fever hospital, which they considered "undermines the principle of democratic government. Wolverhampton Labour Party Minutes, Local Labour Party Meeting, 2 August 1923.

77 Ibid., Executive Committee Meeting, 10 August 1923.

78 The Committee was to consist of all elected Labour councillors plus two members from the East Division and five from the West. Ibid., Local Labour Party Meeting, 23 August 1922.

79 Ibid., Executive Committee Meeting, 11 March 1924, Local Labour Party Meeting, 3 April 1924. Davies stood down as Party Chairman during the dispute.

80 Ibid., Executive Committee Meeting, 21 July 1924.

81 Ibid., Executive Committee Meeting, 31 July 1924.

82 Ibid., Local Labour Party Meeting, 2 October 1924.



- 83 See Appendices Table E.
- 84 Midland Chronicle, 26 October 1923.
- 85 The Times, 4 December 1923.
- 86 Birmingham Gazette, 7 July 1921, Midland Chronicle, 9 November 1923.
- 87 The figure given by the Birmingham Post for December 1923 was 2,648. Birmingham Post, 28 December 1924.
- 88 Ibid., 20 October 1924.
- 89 Allen, G.C. (1929), p.382 and p.403.
- 90 Birmingham Post, 22 November 1923.
- 91 Ibid., 24 November 1923.
- 92 Ibid., 3 December 1923. Parkes also displayed an aluminium saucepan, which was made locally for 6d profit. He claimed that this would be impossible but for Safeguarding. Midland Chronicle, 23 and 30 November 1923. Quoted in Rolfe, K.W.D. (1974), p.201.
- 93 Birmingham Gazette, 29 November 1923.
- 94 Birmingham Post, 27 November 1923.
- 95 Having made no returns for individual members in 1921 and 1922, the figures for 1923 and 1924 were the minimum of £1/10, representing 180 members. Labour Party Annual Report 1922, pp.152-3, Annual Report 1923, pp.159-60, Annual Report 1924, pp.278-9 and Annual Report 1925, p.156. See Appendices Table F.
- 96 Midland Chronicle, 7 December 1923. The Times, 4 December 1923 reckoned that such “rowdyism” would lose Labour votes.
- 97 Roberts was described as playing his violin at meetings “with a smile that is a benediction... while Rome is burning”. Birmingham Post, 27 November 1923.
- 98 Midland Chronicle, 30 November 1923, 7 December 1923.
- 99 Birmingham Post, 20 October 1924. Roberts was said to go to “little concerts and fiddles benignantly, lulling unthinking people into an acceptance of the all sufficing prepotency of Socialist nostrums”.
- 100 Midland Chronicle, 31 October 1924.
- 101 Ibid., 7 November 1924.

102 Liberals retained their seats at Lyng and Tantany, whilst capturing Greets Green from Labour. See Appendices Table E.

103 Birmingham Gazette, 25 October 1924.

104 Midland Chronicle, 24 October 1924.

105 Birmingham Gazette, 29 October 1924.

106 Birmingham Post, 27 November 1923.

107 From Roberts's speeches at Spon Lane, 14 October and Hill Top, 13 October. Midland Chronicle, 17 October 1924.

108 Ibid., 24 October 1924.

109 In particular he pointed out that, although Labour promised cheap food in the 1923 election, "the housewives have got the dear loaf". The price of bread, he claimed, had risen from 8¾ to 9 ½d since the last election. Birmingham Post, 28 October 1924.

110 Ibid., 28 October 1924.

111 Birmingham Gazette 28 October 1924.

112 Midland Chronicle 7 December 1923.

113 Ibid., 31 October 1924.

114 Smethwick Telephone, 8 December 1923.

115 Birmingham Gazette, 30 June 1921, Midland Chronicle, 9 November 1923, Smethwick Telephone, 18 October 1924.

116 The Birmingham Post claimed that with the exception briefly of Coventry "the unemployment figures for Smethwick ... have been the worst in the country". Birmingham Post, 27 November 1923.

117 Ibid., 28 October 1924.

118 Ibid., 27 November 1923.

119 Smethwick Telephone, 1 December 1923.

120 The Smethwick Telephone reported that Chamberlain's meeting of the 30 November revived memories of Joseph Chamberlain's Tariff Reform meetings of January 1906. Ibid., 1 December 1923.

121 Birmingham Post, 20 October 1924.



122 Pike claimed that it cost the Birmingham Carriage and Wagon Co. £30 for labour and materials for track wheels, compared with £18 in Belgium. Ibid., 20 October 1924.

123 Smethwick Telephone, 25 October 1924. Birmingham Post, 20 October 1924.

124 The local Liberal councillors, who made the poster appeal, were Aldermen G.Bowden and C.W.Pinkney and Councillors E.Adams and T.W.Evans. Birmingham Gazette, 25 October 1924.

125 Birmingham Post, 27 November 1923.

126 Davison claimed that "from 1914 to 1918 there was a capital levy on the life of the nation and it was paid in the full. He therefore supported the capital levy for all it was worth". Town Crier, 30 November 1923.

127 Smethwick Telephone, 1 December 1923.

128 Birmingham Gazette, 28 October 1924.

129 Smethwick Telephone, 25 October 1924.

130 Ibid., 18 October 1924.

131 Ibid., 8 December 1923.

132 Birmingham Gazette, 5 December 1923.

133 Pike did point out after the Election that his meetings "had been attended with what one might say a certain sort of 'liveliness', yet he had nothing against his opponent and nothing against the public of Smethwick, who had attended those meetings". Smethwick Telephone, 1 November 1924.

134 Birmingham Gazette, 7 July 1921, Tipton Herald, 24 November 1923.

135 Birmingham Gazette, 30 June 1921, Tipton Herald, 24 November 1923. Darlaston was one town in the Black Country, which was making a revival, due to its links with the car component industry through the manufacture of wheels. Allen, G.C. (1929), p.403.

136 Quoted from the Manchester Guardian in the Midland Advertiser and Wednesbury Borough News, 18 October 1924.

137 See Williams's speeches at Burnt Tree on 24 November and at Dudley Port 22 November in Tipton Herald, 24 November 1923.

138 See Williams's speech at Tipton on 28 November. Ibid., 1 December 1923.

139 See Williams's speech at Dudley Port on 22 November. Ibid., 24 November 1923. Williams paraded a bullock on a cattle float with the notice 'Vote for Williams and No Tax on Food'.

Midland Advertiser and Wednesbury Herald, 1 December 1923. Quoted in Rolfe, K.W.D. (1974), p.202.

140 In his letter Davies pointed out that in the last 2½ years he had paid out £750,000 in wages and £20,000 in local rates, during a time of “very heavy losses”. Midland Advertiser and Wednesbury Herald, 1 December 1923.

141 Ibid., 8 December 1923.

142 Wolverhampton Express and Star, 4 December 1923.

143 See Short’s speech at Darlaston on 21 November. Tipton Herald, 24 November 1923.

144 Birmingham Post, 3 December 1923. Short used literally big and little loaves to illustrate his point. Midland Advertiser and Wednesbury Herald, 24 November 1923. Quoted in Rolfe, K.W.D. (1974), p.202.

145 Birmingham Gazette, 28 November 1923.

146 For reference to Short’s activities in Parliament in 1923 see Hansard, 168 pp.569-71. He ascertained, for instance, that an average of 565 women were unemployed in Darlaston between April 1921 and February 1923. Hansard, 162, 18 April 1923, pp.2087-8.

147 Midland Advertiser and Wednesbury Herald, 8 December 1923.

148 Birmingham Post, 3 December 1923.

149 See Short’s speech at Wednesbury on 29 November. Tipton Herald, 1 December 1923.

150 Birmingham Gazette, 24 November 1923.

151 The Birmingham Post wrote that they expected that Short’s appeals to be returned on this occasion would be “in vain”. Birmingham Post, 25 October 1924.

152 Wolverhampton Express and Star, 16 October 1924.

153 Ibid., 10 October 1924. Birmingham Post, 25 October 1924.

154 Wolverhampton Express and Star, 17 October 1924.

155 Tipton Herald, 25 October 1924.

156 Ibid., 18 October 1924.

157 Midland Advertiser and Wednesbury Borough News, 25 October 1924.

158 Ibid., 18 October 1924.

159 Ibid., 25 October 1924.

160 Ibid., 1 November 1924.



- 161 Tipton Herald, 1 November 1924.
- 162 Vachell claimed: - "Time alone has beaten us. If I could have had a month, I should have won the seat". Ibid., 1 November 1924.
- 163 Midland Advertiser and Wednesbury Borough News, 1 November 1924.
- 164 There were no returns for individual members in Wednesbury for 1922 and 1924, whilst the minimum of £1/10 was returned for 1923. Labour Party Annual Report 1923, pp.159-60, Annual Report 1924, pp.278-9 and Annual Report 1925, p.156. See Appendices Table F..
- 165 Birmingham Post, 28 November 1923.
- 166 Ibid., 3 December 1923.
- 167 Wolverhampton Express and Star, 29 November 1923.
- 168 Dudley Herald, 17 November 1923.
- 169 Blackwell's speech at Old Hill. Ibid., 1 December 1923.
- 170 Birmingham Post, 16 November 1923. In Kingswinford there was "a total cessation of Liberal activities". Quoted in Cook, C. The Age of Alignment (1975), p.34.
- 171 Birmingham Post, 28 November 1923.
- 172 Dudley Herald, 17 November 1923.
- 173 Birmingham Post, 3 December 1923.
- 174 Wolverhampton Express and Star, 4 December 1923.
- 175 Birmingham Post, 26 November 1923.
- 176 Birmingham Gazette, 6 December 1923.
- 177 Birmingham Post, 28 November 1923.
- 178 Tipton Herald, 25 October 1924.
- 179 The candidates were Beyfus, the Coalition Liberal candidate, in 1918 and Blackwell, the 1923 candidate. Birmingham Post, 21 October 1924. Wolverhampton Express and Star, 25 October 1924.
- 180 Birmingham Gazette, 24 October 1924.
- 181 Ibid., 27 October 1924.
- 182 Wolverhampton Express and Star, 17 October 1924. Sitch pledged that Labour would build 90,000 then 100,000 new houses a year. Tipton Herald, 25 October 1924.
- 183 Wolverhampton Express and Star, 28 October 1924.

184 Ibid., 30 October 1924.

185 Indeed there were no returns for individual members in the constituency for 1923 and 1924. The Labour Party Annual Report 1924, pp.278-9 and Annual Report 1925, p.156. See Appendices Table F.

186 According to Barnsby the Labour Party achieved "little" in 1923 and 1924 in Bilston itself, although in Coseley they kept 7 councillors out of 20 between 1922-25 and they held on to control in Sedgley until 1925. Unfortunately he gives no references for this information. Barnsby, G. (1998), p.419 and 422.

187 A peak of 7,121 was reached in June 1921, which had declined to 4,010 in October 1922 and 3,981 in October 1923. Birmingham Gazette, 23 June 1921, Midland Chronicle, 9 November 1923.

188 Wolverhampton Express and Star, 4 December 1923.

189 Birmingham Post, 3 December 1923.

190 For the influence of the Hickman family on the Bilston Conservative Party see K.D.Gardner (1994), p.64.

191 Wolverhampton Express and Star, 29 November 1923.

192 Ibid., 7 December 1923.

193 Ibid., 5 December 1923.

194 Ibid., 29 October 1924. Birmingham Post, 29 October 1924. A notice by Howard Bury asked:- 'Do You want Civil War in England?' Wolverhampton Express and Star, 28 October 1924.

195 Birmingham Post, 16 October 1924.

196 Ibid., 20 October 1924.

197 This comment was a response to the leaflet:- 'What Communism means to women'. Wolverhampton Express and Star, 29 October 1924.

198 Ibid., 17 October 1924.

199 Baker claimed exports doubled between March and May 1924, whilst the price of "a touring car" fell from £362 to £264. Ibid., 25 October 1924.

200 Birmingham Post, 29 October 1924.

201 Wolverhampton Express and Star, 30 October 1924.

202 Ibid., 30 October 1924. Hague was also to be Bilston's Labour agent. The Labour Party Annual Report 1925, p.329.



- 203 Bilston's individual affiliation fees for 1926 were £12, which represented 1,500 members. The Labour Party Annual Report 1927, p.150
- 204 Wolverhampton Labour Party Minutes, Executive Meeting, 5 April 1923. Whilst in London Davies was recommended by Walkden and Wade to see Brown, who was available as a candidate. After informally putting the matter to Brown, Davies then met the Executive Committee of the Civil Service Clerical Association, where it was agreed to put his name forward for selection.
- 205 Daily Sketch, 4 November 1929, Labour Party Records. The article quotes Brown as working as a bootblack and knife cleaner, when he was 8, at a parson's house. Later he worked as an errand boy for a grocer. His first full time job was in the kitchen of a restaurant for 7 shillings a week.
- 206 Evening Chronicle 16 May 1938. Labour Party Records. The article states that his family never earned above £2 a week. His father was a plumber and then a sanitary inspector with 7 children.
- 207 The result was Brown 34, Sproson 17 and Willey 6. Wolverhampton Labour Party Minutes, Selection Conference, 15 May 1923.
- 208 Ibid., Executive Committee Meeting, 5 June 1923.
- 209 Birmingham Post, 30 November 1923.
- 210 Ibid., 1 December 1923.
- 211 Rolfe, K.W.D. (1974), p.201.
- 212 Bird with his management committee sent a telegram to the Conservative Central Office expressing their dislike of tariffs:- "My friends and self protest strongly against any declaration by premier for protective tariffs... West Wolverhampton is only held against ever increasing Labour strength by support of strong body of Liberal opinion, which will unfailingly abstain if antagonised." K.D.Gardner (1994), pp.85-6.
- 213 Birmingham Gazette, 24 November 1923.
- 214 Ibid., 5 December 1923.
- 215 Wolverhampton Express and Star, 30 November 1923.
- 216 Birmingham Post, 30 November 1923.
- 217 Birmingham Gazette, 30 November 1923. Thorne, who was unopposed, recommended that Liberals in the West abstain. He claimed that the capital levy would increase unemployment. Wolverhampton Express and Star, 4 December 1923.
- 218 Ibid., 3 December 1923.

219 Ibid., 4 December 1923.

220 Birmingham Post, 3 December 1923.

221 Wolverhampton Express and Star, 1 December 1923.

222 Birmingham Gazette, 26 November 1923.

223 Birmingham Post, 3 December 1923.

224 Wolverhampton Express and Star, 1 December 1923.

225 Ibid., 7 December 1923.

226 Birmingham Post, 3 December 1923.

227 Wolverhampton Express and Star, 14 October 1924. Unemployment had reached 13,061 in May 1921. It had dropped to around 8,000 at the time of the 1922 and 1923 Elections. Birmingham Gazette, 2 June 1921. Midland Chronicle, 9 November 1923.

228 Birmingham Post, 20 October 1924.

229 Wolverhampton Express and Star, 14 October 1924.

230 Ibid., 28 October 1924.

231 Birmingham Post, 20 October 1924.

232 Ibid., 28 October 1924.

233 Wolverhampton Express and Star, 24 October 1924, Birmingham Post, 25 October 1924.

234 Ibid., 20 October 1924.

235 Ibid., 28 October 1924.

236 Wolverhampton Express and Star, 28 October 1924.

237 Brown complained of being described “a common man” by Bird and “as full of bounce and moonshine” by Bird’s wife. Ibid., 28 October 1924.

238 Ibid., 24 October 1924. The argument here was that Labour should be given a chance. Birmingham Post, 25 October 1924.

239 Ibid., 28 October 1924.

240 Ibid., 25 October 1924.

241 Wolverhampton Express and Star, 29 October 1924.

242 Ibid., 30 October 1924.

243 Birmingham Post, 20 October 1924.



244 According to Cook in this election “Labour seemed to see the Liberal Party as a greater enemy than the Conservatives”. Cook, C. The Age of Alignment (1975), p.303.

245 Birmingham Post, 20 October 1924.

246 Ibid., 17 October 1924. Williams had previously unsuccessfully fought the Carmarthen and Liverpool West Derby seats for Labour.

247 According to the Birmingham Post Williams was “promised the support of the locksmiths of Willenhall, which ... has filled Mr Thorne with the utmost chagrin”. Ibid., 28 October 1924.

248 Ibid., 25 October 1924.

249 Wolverhampton Express and Star, 28 October 1924.

250 Birmingham Gazette, 28 October 1924.

251 Birmingham Post, 25 October 1924. Thorne was particularly aggrieved since in the previous Election he had issued an appeal to Liberals in the West to back Labour.

252 Wolverhampton Express and Star, 29 October 1924.

253 Ibid., 10 October 1924.

254 Strangman claimed that Belgian steel billets were coming into the country at £9 a ton, whilst it cost over £11 to make them here. Birmingham Post 23 October 1924.

255 Ibid., 29 October 1924.

256 Wolverhampton Express and Star, 30 October 1924.

257 Birmingham Post, 5 December 1923. Ibid., 22 October 1924. The total for 29 October 1923 was 4,863, which was only slightly down on 4,903 for the same week in 1922. Midland Chronicle, 9 November 1923.

258 Birmingham Gazette, 14 July 1921.

259 Kelly's Directory of Worcestershire 1924, p.217. Dudley's industries were listed as:- “Iron and coal trades – stone quarrying, lime and coke burning and iron and brass firing – brick, fire brick, tile and cement works.

260 Birmingham Post, 22 October 1924.

261 Ibid., 3 December 1923.

262 Birmingham Post, 23 November 1923.

263 The result of the by election in St Thomas's Ward was:-

C.Whitehouse (Con)	1,068
C.J.Starling (Lab)	<u>580</u>

Dudley Herald, 24 November 1923.

264 Birmingham Gazette, 5 December 1923.

265 Ibid., 28 November 1923.

266 Ibid., 5 December 1923.

267 Birmingham Post, 21 November 1923.

268 Dudley Herald, 5 December 1923.

269 Ibid., 1 December 1923.

270 Ibid., 24 November 1923.

271 Birmingham Post, 3 December 1923.

272 There were also rumours about him once standing on a Conservative platform and questions about why his wife was not with him. Wolverhampton Express and Star, 5 December 1923.

273 Dudley Herald, 8 December 1923.

274 Wolverhampton Express and Star, 7 December 1923.

275 There was a minimum contribution of £1/10 for the Dudley Labour Party in 1923. Labour Party Annual Report 1924, p.278-9.

276 Dudley Herald, 8 December 1923. By contrast the Conservatives in Dudley were said to have “a well equipped organisation”. Birmingham Post, 3 December 1923.

277 Ibid., 22 October 1924. Oliver Baldwin was imprisoned by the Bolsheviks and fought for the Armenians against the Turks, during which he was to be sentenced to death.

278 Wolverhampton Express and Star, 10 October 1924. Baldwin’s breach with his father was partially repaired later. Williamson, P. (1999), p.71.

279 Birmingham Post, 27 October 1924.

280 Birmingham Gazette, 22 October 1924, Dudley Herald, 25 October 1924. Baldwin was told that landlords would never make their properties habitable under the present system.

281 Ibid., 25 October 1924.

282 Birmingham Post, 27 October 1924.

283 Dudley listed £3/6/8 in Affiliation Fees for 1924, with members paying 2d each. The figure was the standard £1/10 for the previous year. Labour Party Annual Report 1925, p.156.

284 Birmingham Gazette, 25 October 1924.



- 285 Birmingham Post, 28 October 1924. Wolverhampton Express and Star, 28 October 1924.
- 286 Birmingham Gazette, 22 October 1924.
- 287 The Birmingham Post reported a former president of the Liberal Association offering “his services at meetings in support of the Unionist candidate”. Birmingham Post, 22 October 1924.
- 288 Wolverhampton Express and Star, 30 October 1924. The number of motor cars was probably important, given that the weather during the election was “atrocious”.
- 289 Dudley Herald, 1 November 1924.
- 290 Birmingham Gazette, 7 July 1921, Midland Chronicle, 9 November 1923.
- 291 Walsall’s industries were also listed as locks, bolts, keys, pulleys, brushes and spectacles. Also brass and iron foundries, iron, galvanised iron and iron tube works. Kelly’s Directory of Staffordshire 1924, p.484.
- 292 Birmingham Gazette, 6 December 1923.
- 293 Birmingham Post, 3 December 1923.
- 294 The clash was supposed to have taken place at a Labour Day demonstration in 1920. Cartwright went on to form the Wednesfield and District Miners’ Association. Dean, K.G. (1972), pp.74-75.
- 295 The Times, 1 December 1923.
- 296 Birmingham Post, 3 December 1923.
- 297 The Times, 1 December 1923.
- 298 Dean, K.G. (1972), p. 96, Walsall Observer, 26 May 1923.
- 299 Councillor Hucker and Mr W.Abbotts visited Labour H.Q. in London for financial assistance. Ibid., 24 November 1923, 8 December 1923.
- 300 The Times, 1 December 1923.
- 301 Walsall Labour Party Election Manifesto. Osburn put the treatment of ex-servicemen and pensioners as his main priority. He called for pensions for widows and the removal of the income limit on old age pensions. Osburn also wanted women to have the same voting rights as men.
- 302 Walsall Observer, 1 December 1923.
- 303 The Times, 4 December 1923. In addition to predicting a Conservative gain in Walsall, they also predicted probable gains at Kingswinford, West Bromwich and Smethwick.
- 304 Birmingham Post, 25 October 1924.
- 305 Dean, K.G. (1972), p.99.

- 306 Walsall Observer, 25 October 1924.
- 307 Birmingham Post, 25 October 1924.
- 308 Walsall Observer, 18 October 1924.
- 309 Ibid., 25 October 1924.
- 310 Collins also claimed that he had “voted for true Labour measures” Birmingham Gazette, 28 October 1924.
- 311 Walsall Observer, 15 November 1924.
- 312 Wolverhampton Express and Star, 16 October 1924.
- 313 Walsall Observer, 1 November 1924.
- 314 Birmingham Post, 3 December 1923.
- 315 Birmingham Gazette, 26 May 1921, Midland Chronicle, 9 November 1923. Brierley Hill was, of course, part of the Kingswinford constituency.
- 316 Birmingham Post, 30 November 1923. Pielou was said to be less enthusiastic than Lloyd in Dudley for Protection, claiming that if introduced it would lead to “a smaller loaf”. Dudley Herald, 17 November 1923.
- 317 Birmingham Post, 1 December 1923.
- 318 Ibid., 3 December 1923.
- 319 Ibid., 22 November 1923.
- 320 Ibid., 30 November 1923, Express and Star, 4 December 1923 and Barnsby, G. (1998), p.416.
- 321 Birmingham Post, 30 November 1923.
- 322 Birmingham Gazette, 29 November 1923.
- 323 Birmingham Post, 22 November 1923.
- 324 Birmingham Gazette, 1 December 1923.
- 325 Membership fees for the Stourbridge Labour Party rose from the basic £1/10 in 1923 to £2 in 1924 and £2/10 in 1925. Labour Party Annual Report 1924, pp.278-9, Annual Report 1925, p.156 and Annual Report 1926, p.151. See Appendices Table F.
- 326 Birmingham Post, 23 October 1924.
- 327 Tipton Herald, 25 October 1924.
- 328 Wolverhampton Express and Star, 16 October 1924.



329 Pielou had introduced a bill for the compulsory employment of ex-servicemen. Birmingham Post, 23 October 1924.

330 Pielou believed in “protecting the trades suffering from the effects of unfair competition by placing them under the Safeguarding of Industries Act”. Wolverhampton Express and Star, 16 October 1924.

331 Birmingham Post, 23 October 1924.

332 Wolverhampton Express and Star, 31 October 1924.

333 Labour did not contest Stourbridge in 1922. If this vote were added to the total then Labour’s overall proportion of the vote would have been 36.2 per cent, which would have meant that their share of the vote increased in 1923. Appendices Tables A and B.

334 These seats were Smethwick, Wednesbury and Wolverhampton West.

335 Cook, C. The Age of Alignment (1975), p.164.

336 These seats were Walsall and West Bromwich.

337 Cook, C. The Age of Alignment (1975), p.165.

338 Ibid., P321-2.

## CHAPTER 4 – 1924-1929

### A. NATIONAL DEVELOPMENTS

The period from Labour's defeat in the 1924 General Election to its success in 1929 was one of steady electoral advance by the party. In his analysis of local election results during this period, Cook has pointed to consistent gains each year, with the biggest advance coming in 1926, the year of the General Strike, when it was thought that the working-class electorate were radicalised by events.(1) Cook has also analysed by-election results for this period, during which Labour captured 13 seats (11 from the Conservatives and 2 from the Liberals). He has found that the yearly swing to Labour accelerated from 4.9 per cent in 1925 and 5.9 per cent in 1926 to 7.6 per cent in 1928 and 12 per cent in 1929.(2)

Despite these successes these were not easy years for the Labour Party itself. In the immediate aftermath of the 1924 General Election, for instance, there was much internal criticism of the record of the 1924 Labour Government and of MacDonald's leadership. At the 1925 Party Conference the lead was taken by Ernest Bevin, the trade union leader, who never forgave MacDonald for his threat to use emergency powers in dealing with the dock and tramway strikes. The Left, in the form of George Lansbury and the Clydesiders, were also critical. MacDonald, however, retained the support of the bulk of the right wing trade union MPs.(3)

The years 1925 and 1926 saw a return to 'direct action' by the unions, as a result of the coal crisis, which culminated in the General Strike. MacDonald privately opposed these events. He realised that it was unlikely that the Government would be defeated in the General Strike. Moreover he knew that a consequence of these events would be a continued drift of Liberal voters to the Conservatives as in 1924.(4) Nevertheless it can be argued that despite his victory in the General Strike Baldwin's triumph was short lived. According to Pugh, the Conservative triumph "represented a major setback" since "it undermined their claims to treat the working class fairly and to represent the national interest". He sees this as helping "to lay the foundations" for Labour's victory in the 1929 General Election.(5)

A further consequence of the Government's success in the General Strike was Baldwin's decision to attack the union levy to the Labour Party, by legislating for members to 'contract in' rather than 'contract out'. This was to have a considerable financial impact on the party throughout the remainder of this period, especially in regions like the Black Country, where local parties were dependent on union backing. One consequence was the influence it had on the choice of candidates in these



constituencies, making local parties more willing to accept rich donors. This was something that many Labour leaders were wary of.(6)

An alternative strategy for Labour was to build up individual membership. Efforts were made, for instance, to make it easier for members to pay their subscriptions.(7) Another way to increase membership was for local parties to appeal to a broader urban working class by concentrating on neighbourhood politics with policies for municipal housing, transport, electricity and education. One of the guiding lights behind this approach was Herbert Morrison, who was himself suspicious of the trade unions. Savage, in his study of the Labour Party in Preston, illustrates how the local party here changed focus in this way. He suggests that the reason for Labour's popularity in the late 1920s was more due to this change of strategy than out of sympathy for the miners following the General Strike.(8) It is reflected in the figures for the 1929 General Election, in which constituency parties sponsored 364 of the 569 Labour candidates, of whom 128 were successful.(9)

Nevertheless despite these changes it is generally agreed that at a local level the Labour Party in the late 1920s was still dominated by the trade unions, as their financial contribution was indispensable. Reynolds and Laybourn, for instance, have stressed the importance in West Yorkshire of the close association between the trade unions and the local Labour parties.(10) Not only did trade unionists dominate the constituency parties, their officials were also candidates for council and national elections. Indeed Laybourn points out that for the 1929 General Election there were to be more trade union sponsored candidates than before.(11)

Riddell too agrees that trade unions dominated the party despite efforts to increase individual membership. He gives figures showing that in 1929 there were 227,897 individual members in 578 local parties, making an average of 400 per party. At the same time there were 2 million affiliated union members, although this was down from a peak of 4.3 million in 1920, due to the overall decline in union membership and the introduction of contracting in.(12)

By the late 1920s the leadership in the form of MacDonald, Henderson and Snowden had a big influence over the Party. This was a consequence of the defeat of the unions in the General Strike, coupled with the low individual party membership. MacDonald wanted Labour to move gradually towards socialism with the backing of a broad range of the population. It meant that the Party had to break with the extreme Left.(13) At the London Party Conference in 1924 members of the Communist Party were debarred for the first time from membership of the Labour Party. Attempts the next year to

refer this decision back to the Executive Committee were defeated with comfortable majorities.(14) This led to the disbanding of 26 constituency parties between 1926-28, including Edgbaston and Moseley in Birmingham.(15)

Thorpe also points out that at this time the women's movement, which had played a significant part in Labour politics before 1918, was becoming marginalised.(16) Calls for a higher status for the women's conference and for the women members of the NEC to be elected by women were rejected.(17) The Party also avoided so called women's issues such as birth control, partly out of fear of alienating Catholic voters.(18) Nevertheless in many local parties women played an active part, with many standing in council elections and as Poor Law Guardians, although in some local parties their role was only that of routine activities.(19)

Thorpe concludes that in the late 1920s there was "an ideological stagnation" with the Party drifting into a policy of "minimal short term change at home".(20) This view can be seen in a new programme Labour and the Nation, produced by Tawney in 1928. It proved to be a typically vague document with few definite proposals, which was later blamed for the failure of the second Labour Government.(21). What was needed was a more specific programme for a five year Labour Government, but this was something that the Party, with so many obvious divisions, might have found difficult to produce. Meanwhile an alternative programme had been drawn up by the ILP under the guidance of James Maxton. In 1926 they produced a radical document The Living Wage, which envisaged a solution to unemployment through a high wage economy. This was rejected at the 1927 Labour Party Conference. The ILP followed this with the unofficial Cook – Maxton campaign of 1928, which called for a new class struggle and an end to compromise. This was easily defeated by the party leadership, who emerged in an even stronger position.

As the 1929 General Election approached the Labour Party was threatened by Lloyd George, who launched a programme entitled We can Conquer Unemployment, which advocated the raising of £250 million by means of a loan, to be spent on public works schemes, such as road building, housing and electricity. Labour's response to this was to produce a new pamphlet, How to Conquer Unemployment, which described the Liberal proposals as either stolen from the Labour Party or financially unsound. Unemployment, it claimed, could not be cured by "palliatives" but by "a lasting restoration of industry". Labour proposed schemes for housing, electricity, roads and land improvements, which were



to be financed by taxation. Critics, however, described the programme as too abstract, general and not costed.(22)

The 1929 General Election was the first at which women had equal voting rights with men at a common age of 21. This added about 5 million new voters to the register, giving women a majority in 85 per cent of the seats.(23) Since there was an increase of 3 million in the Labour vote there have been some suggestions that the 'flapper vote' benefited Labour. Certainly, as Savage has shown in the case of Preston, many constituency parties had worked during the late 1920s to broaden their appeal in order to secure membership and support from women.(24) Nevertheless in this General Election none of the Parties made a special appeal to women or the young. Indeed historians have shown that it was the Conservatives, who were better able to mobilise support amongst women at this time.(25)

Baldwin went into the General Election with a 'Safety First' programme, stressing the responsible and sound nature of his Government. He wanted to contrast this with what he considered the radical and irresponsible policies of his opponents, especially Lloyd George.(26) Protection was rejected, but the slogan 'Sow Safeguarding and Reap Prosperity' was to be widely posted in the West Midlands.(27) Safeguarding had been renewed by the Conservative Government, but they now wanted to extend it, claiming that Labour would threaten jobs by removing it. For a while the matter became a national controversy, when Sir Herbert Austin, in a letter to the Conservative candidate in the Birmingham Kings Norton constituency, warned that a Labour Government which repealed safeguarding, would lead him to close the Longbridge car works.(28)

With unemployment at 1.1 million most historians would agree that this was the major issue in the Election. C.L.Mowat claimed that the Conservatives lost due to "their pugnacity in 1927, their flabbiness since, especially concerning unemployment and disarmament. They offered safety first but so did Labour which, since the General Strike, had cold shouldered its extremists and grown eminently respectable".(29) Rather controversially A.J.P.Taylor disagreed with this verdict, claiming that "there was no burning question to excite the passion of the electorate". Unemployment, he claimed, was seen as "an evil but inevitable" and the General Election turned "solely on the question of 'who should be the next Prime Minister?'"(30)

One historian of the Conservative Party, J.Ramsden, has claimed that Baldwin lost the General Election because the Party was out of touch with the national mood, being too "defensive" and "unadventurous". Baldwin has been accused of being too complacent, attacking the Labour and Liberal

programmes but offering nothing in return. His slogan 'Safety First' was later criticised as "safety first and nothing second". It may have worked in 1924 and 1931 but in 1929 the electorate was "ready to try something more adventurous".(31)

The result of the 1929 Election was that 287 of Labour's candidates were elected compared to 260 Conservatives and 59 Liberals. The swing to Labour was 6.4 per cent, bringing them 126 net gains. Yet the Conservatives polled 300,000 more votes, giving them 38.1 per cent of the total to Labour's 37.1 per cent. Historians have made much of the fact that as many as 118 of Labour's seats were held on a minority vote in three-cornered contests. It meant that a swing of just 2.5 per cent to the Conservatives would secure them 20 seats from the Liberals and 46 from Labour. This has led Cook to describe the result as "a marked step forward" but "hardly... the secure victory that on the surface it appeared".(32) At the same time, however, it should be noted that the Conservatives won only 60 seats with a clear majority, leaving 150 held on a minority vote. The figures are a reflection of the large Liberal vote, although this secured them only 59 seats from 5.3 million votes.

Cook has pointed out that the constituency parties sponsored 43.9 per cent of Labour's victorious candidates. This was easily their highest proportion and compares with the 40.1 per cent backed by the trade unions (33) The total Labour vote of 8.37 million also suggests that the Party was drawing support away from the trade union movement. In fact, as Riddell points out, only a quarter of the workforce was unionised in 1929, which meant that the total Labour vote was over twice the union membership of 3.67 million.(34) Savage has used the election results to support his view that Labour was winning support in the big cities by pursuing social policies which appealed to a broader section of the working class. He points out that whereas in 1918 Labour's strength lay outside the cities, in 1929 Labour won nearly two-thirds of the seats in large urban areas. These accounted for 40 per cent of their MPs, compared with 19 per cent in 1918.(35)

Labour's gains in the 1929 General Election were general across the country. The biggest advances, however, came in those working-class areas where Labour had underperformed in the 1924 General Election. Hence in Lancashire and Cheshire the advance was from 18 to 44, in the West Midlands from 11 to 25 and in London and Greater London from 28 to 54.(36) Although the result owed much to national factors the Labour advance was still very dependent on local developments, either in the constituencies or amongst the trade unions.



## **B. REGIONAL DEVELOPMENTS**

### **1. THE LABOUR PARTY IN BIRMINGHAM**

The Labour Party was to make one of its biggest advances during this period in Birmingham. Having gained its first parliamentary seat in 1924, the party went on to win 6 of the 12 seats in the 1929 General Election. There was little evidence of this, however, in the 1924 and 1925 municipal elections. In those held in 1924, which came only three days after the General Election, Labour did reasonably well nationally, making 20 net gains. This compared to the 8 gains made by the Conservatives, whilst the Liberals lost 14 seats. Yet in Birmingham the Conservatives made 7 gains and Labour lost 5 seats.(37)

1925 was the year of 'Red Friday', when the TUC decided to back the miners in their fight to preserve their wage rates and hours of work. Despite this apparent victory for the working class, the municipal elections of that year saw only modest gains for Labour. In Birmingham Labour lost 2 more seats overall, leaving them with only 17 members on a council of 120. The Conservative's motto of 'Down with the Reds and Down with the Rates' proved to be persuasive.(38)

Labour's disappointing performances in Birmingham at this time have been analysed by Boughton. One factor commonly accepted by historians was the civic tradition, associated with the Chamberlain family and the Unionist Party. After a stutter in the immediate post-war years, the Party found its feet again in the mid 1920s. A range of local services were provided, including municipal baths, hospitals and health centres, along with a bigger council house programme per head of population than in any other city in the country. Even opponents described it as "an inspiring record of the successes and practicality of social ownership". Equally significant was the strength of the Birmingham Unionist Association, which Boughton describes as "the most efficient political machine in the country". It had an annual income of £10,000 compared with only £750 for Labour. There were also 20,000 paid up members with 15,000 in a separate women's organisation.(39)

Meanwhile between 1926 and 1928 the Birmingham Labour Party was hit by an internal row over the candidacy of Dr Robert Dunstan for the parliamentary seat of Birmingham West. Dunstan had fought Ladywood for Labour in 1922 and 1923, but left the party over his views on land confiscations. In 1924 he had fought Birmingham West for the Communist Party with much Labour backing. Then in 1926 Labour selected O.G.Willey of the ILP as their candidate for this seat, although Dunstan wanted to stand again. The party was to become seriously divided over the controversy with Joseph Southall



the vice president of the party and former anti-war protester, along with the Edgbaston and Mosley Labour Parties supporting Dunstan.(40) In November 1927 a number of left wingers, including Southall, were expelled from the Borough Labour Party at a meeting of the Executive Committee.(41) Southall appealed to the members, claiming that "certain rich men influenced the policy of both the Party and the Town Crier". This was an attack on the paper's editor, W.J.Chamberlain, and perhaps also on Oswald Mosley. The Executive Committee's decision, however, was backed by 99 votes to 33.(42) Following this in 1928, having continued to back Southall and the expelled members, the decision was taken to disaffiliate the Edgbaston and Moseley Divisional Parties.(43) The decision was confirmed by the NEC, who appointed George Lansbury, Frank Roberts, Arthur Henderson and G.R.Shepherd to hold an inquiry and consider the views.(44)

Despite this controversy Labour made steady progress in Birmingham from 1926 down to the 1929 General Election. One factor behind this is thought to have been the active part played by Birmingham trade unions in the General Strike.(45) The response to the strike call by the first wave was almost total. 20-30,000 were estimated to have gone on strike, with many more out of work due to the lack of transport or coal.(46) Others, like the Engineers, were discontented because they were not called out. Indeed Birmingham along with Wolverhampton was to be placed in the first of the four categories with regard to its response.(47) John Strachey later wrote in the Town Crier that the turn-out was remarkable considering that, with regard to trade unions, Birmingham was considered to be "at least ten years behind the best organised areas", whilst 50 per cent of the working class habitually voted Conservative. He claimed that "for the first time the Birmingham workers acted as a class".(48)

Considerable bitterness followed the defeat of the General Strike, as employers sought to exploit their position.(49) Much sympathy was shown within the city for the miners, with the Birmingham Labour movement raising £5,200 for them. At a municipal by-election held at Ladywood three months after the strike, there was considerable hostility shown towards the Unionists. C.Augur, a railwayman and strike leader, captured the seat with a majority of over 1,100 votes. Soon after this Neville Chamberlain was to abandon his parliamentary seat at Ladywood for the more secure one of Edgbaston. In September there was another by-election at Rotton Park, which was part of the Ladywood constituency. This time Labour converted a Unionist majority of 1,294 into a Labour majority of 1,002.(50)



Nevertheless, it is difficult to ascertain whether Labour's advance in the succeeding years was due to any radicalising of the working class. It might, on the other hand, have been the defeat of the trade unions and the loss of some of their powers, which might have persuaded many of the non-unionised members of the working class to turn to Labour. If this were the case then the move would have been made easier by the fact that the Birmingham Labour Party became less militant during the late 1920's, partly as a result of members becoming drawn into positions of civic importance.

One immediate consequence of the aftermath of the General Strike was to be an increase in individual party membership. Until 1926 only Yardley with £3/5/-, equivalent to 390 members, had more than the minimum membership of 180. According to the 1927 Annual Report six other constituency parties had increased their membership by over 50 per cent. The biggest rise was in Sparkbrook, where membership increased to 469.(51) The figures in the 1930 Annual Report, which reflected the situation in the General Election year, gave Kings Norton 630 members, Yardley 600, West Birmingham 420, Aston 396, Ladywood 350 and Handsworth 322.(52) Three of these seats were to be captured by Labour in the General Election.

In the 1926 municipal elections Labour made sweeping gains across the country in what has been seen as a reaction to the defeat of the General Strike. Overall the Party secured 146 gains, including 8 in Birmingham. The advance might have been greater, but as the Birmingham Gazette admitted, "the city was on the whole well governed".(53) Labour continued to make progress in the local elections of 1927 and 1928. In 1927 Labour made a net gain nationally of 90 seats in municipal boroughs, with 3 of these in Birmingham.(54) A further 3 seats were gained in Birmingham in 1928, when 101 municipal seats were gained nationally. Yet even at this stage Labour held less than a third of the seats on the Council.(55)

In the 1929 General Election Labour made its significant breakthrough in Birmingham, securing 41.8 per cent of the vote, which was well above the national average of 37 per cent, and capturing 6 of the 12 seats.(56) Boughton suggests a number of reasons for this success. One significant factor was the growth in importance of national over local politics during the 1920's as the press and radio expanded its influence. Certainly national issues such as the disappointingly inadequate social reforms of Baldwin's Government caused much disgruntlement amongst the Birmingham working class.(57) There was also a generational factor with younger voters less likely to be swayed by the Chamberlain factor. Many of this new generation of workers were growing up on the council estates, which were

being built outside the city's inner ring. It was here that the Unionist movement was least powerful and Labour strongest.(58)

Boughton also considers the role of local 'notables' such as George Cadbury, the chocolate manufacturer, who played a major role in building up Kings Norton as a Labour stronghold during the decade.(59) Another significant personality was Oswald Mosley, who remained a factor in the Birmingham Labour Party, despite his move to Smethwick in 1926. Mosley provided the Party with a subsidy, whilst its organisation was improved by his associates John Strachey and Allan Young. Pugh claims that the working class electorate was flattered to be represented by upper class candidates such as Mosley and Strachey, who captured the Aston seat.(60) Boughton also points to the work of Labour activists such as Percy Shurmer, who worked tirelessly on various local bodies, winning respect within the working-class community.(61)

There was also an economic factor behind Labour's performance, with the continual emergence of factory based manufacturing at the expense of the workshop economy. This helped Labour as it widened class divisions. For a while it seemed that one economic argument would become the major issue in the city, following the intervention of Sir Herbert Austin. He wrote a letter to the press threatening to close the Longbridge car works down, if the Safeguarding duties were repealed by a Labour Government.(62) Indeed Labour lost their seat at Kings Norton, which contained the Longbridge works due in the main to this intervention.

The Unionist case was strongly argued by the Birmingham Post, which claimed in an editorial that "security in the home market" could increase the volume and value of exports. The volume had risen by 33 per cent between 1924-28 in safeguarded industries, whilst declining by 8.5 per cent in others.(63) The Times, in an election report on the city, emphasised "prospering Birmingham", where there were over 28,000 more in work than when the Conservative Government took over. The numbers employed in motor components, for instance, had increased from 6,000 to 9,000.(64) The other side of the argument was made most strongly by the Town Crier, which pointed out that the biggest expansion in the motor industry came from August 1924 to June 1925, when duties were removed.(65)

For the 1929 General Election it seemed, as the Birmingham Gazette announced, that "Protection has been beaten again". The paper went on to declare that "the British public has applied 'Safety First to the Safeguards'".(66) The Town Crier described the result as "sensational", stressing the city's housing conditions as a major factor. The defeat of Dennison in Kings Norton was blamed on Herbert



Austin's "outrageous threat".(67) For the Birmingham Post the Unionist defeat was attributed to the "lavish promises" of Liberals and Labour. It saw, however, in the Kings Norton result "a substantial crumb of comfort" and "a good omen for the recovery at the next election", so long as organisation was improved.(68) Moreover, despite Labour's parliamentary success, the Unionists outvoted Labour with a total of 225,874 votes to 195,500.

## 2. THE LABOUR PARTY IN THE BLACK COUNTRY

### A. THE STATE OF LOCAL PARTIES

Labour's advances in Birmingham were more than matched by those in the Black Country. Between 1924-29 the Party made steady if not continuous progress in local elections, whilst retaining the Smethwick parliamentary seat in a by-election in 1926 and capturing Stourbridge in 1927. Their greatest triumph, however, came in the 1929 General Election, when Labour won 9 of the 10 seats with the Conservatives losing all theirs, whilst the Liberals held on to Wolverhampton East.

In the 1924 municipal elections there were fewer changes in the Black Country than in Birmingham, although many seats were uncontested. This was another reflection of the financial position of the Labour Party. One seat was lost in Smethwick, whilst in Walsall Labour lost a seat to the United Ratepayers' Coalition, which had been set up to check Labour's spending plans. Elsewhere Labour had one net gain in Wolverhampton, whilst in West Bromwich the Labour agent, Guest, regained a seat on the council by capturing Hill Top.(69) Labour again did well in the 1925 municipal elections, winning four of the five contested seats in Smethwick, making one gain from the Conservatives. They also gained seats in Wolverhampton, Walsall and Wednesbury.(70)

The General Strike probably had a bigger impact in the Black Country than in Birmingham, due to the continued presence there of coal mining. The terms offered by the employers meant a pay cut of around 18 per cent for Black Country miners.(71) The main mines at this time were those north of Walsall, along with the large mines such as Baggeridge, Hamstead and Hilton Main. In addition a number of medium to small scale mines remained in parts of Dudley, Rowley Regis and West Bromwich. Trade union membership was low, but when the strike was called there was full support throughout.(72)

The response to the General Strike in the Black Country has been described by one historian as "remarkably solid".(73) Towns such as Smethwick, Stourbridge, Walsall and Wednesbury were



categorised as Class 2, which meant that they were wholly effective but with some weaknesses. There were none in the region that came below this category.(74) The TUC was not only successful in calling out those on strike, it also had to persuade those not included to stay at work. The shortage of fuel, however, soon caused factories to close down and others to be put on a 3-day week. Attempts were made to run volunteer bus services, but in general there was little support for this.

In Wolverhampton, where the response was categorised as Class 1, 35,000 were estimated to have taken part. Amongst the works, reported closed, were the Star Engineering Works, Sunbeam and most of Guy Motors. Elsewhere the three major steel works in the region, the Round Oak in Brierley Hill, the Springvale works in Bilston and the Coombs Wood works in Halesowen were closed. Many more works were closed down due to the shortage of fuel. Two local MPs Charlie Sitch and Alfred Short were closely involved, addressing a crowd of 3,000 in Cradley Heath on Saturday 8 May.

The ending of the General Strike brought much bitterness and disillusionment to many of those involved.(75) The legacy continued, however, with Councillor Salmon unsuccessfully moving a motion that all permanent workers for Smethwick Council should be members of a trade union.(76) Meanwhile local Trades Councils continued to be involved, raising money to support the miners.(77) Eventually the Black Country miners drifted back to work, accepting a deal, which meant a real wage, which was cut to 83 per cent of the 1914 level.(78)

In the 1926 municipal elections Labour had its best performance yet, when the local party secured a majority of two on Smethwick Council after capturing two seats. This gave them control for the first time of a Black Country Municipal Council.(79) Labour also made four gains in Dudley and one in Wednesbury.(80) There were no contests in Wolverhampton in November 1926, because a new Council was to be elected in March 1927, following the extension of the borough boundaries.

Labour was expecting success in Wolverhampton in this election, but the Party was to be disappointed, winning just 12 of the 39 seats.(81) A major reason for this can be found in the anti-Socialist pact, which the Liberals and Conservatives had made for fighting local elections back in 1919. In practice this meant that the Conservatives concentrated on the western wards where their strength lay, whilst the Liberals were content to contest the eastern wards, where the Conservatives had only a limited organisation. The local party agent, W.H.Jacobs, took the defeats seriously, telling the press that Labour "is ready to take what appears to be a defeat with their courage in both hands and a smile across their faces".(82)



At a Ward Council meeting of the local Labour Party on the 28<sup>th</sup> April reports were received from the various wards, which drew a picture of apathy and poor organisation. In the Blakenhall and St. John's Wards, for instance, where three Labour councillors were defeated, there were reports of "not sufficient workers" and "not enough collectors" in Blakenhall and "no collections being made" in St. John's. It was also admitted that boundary revisions had made a difference. In Graisely, where Labour also finished bottom of the poll, the report admitted that there were "few canvassers" and "general apathy shown all round". Also "voluntary collections still being taken but a general fading off in the amount being collected".(83)

Labour gained total success in only the three wards of St. George's, St. Mary's and Bushbury. The latter was dominated by the railway unions and included a large council housing estate. In St. George's the report claimed that success was due to "two years of developing the organisation in the ward", which was "staffed with polling area stewards", who held "a personal canvass" and "open air meetings". In Dunstall, where Emma Sproson stood as an Independent, Labour won only one seat. The report stated that "organisation upset through recent events in the ward and the withdrawal from the party of one of the late councillors. No street captains. Voluntary collections being taken but only a few collectors and not so many subscriptions".(84)

Elsewhere the reports were equally grim. In St. Marks there were "few workers. No checkers... no one to undertake the collections". In Park Ward there was "no organisation.... No street captains.... No voluntary collections being made". There was a similar position in the St. Matthews Ward, where the only Labour candidate to be returned was Miss M.Perry.(85)

In the November municipal elections of 1927 Labour gained four seats in Dudley, one in Smethwick and Walsall, but lost one to a Liberal in West Bromwich.(86) Overall Party representation in the three biggest Black Country boroughs in 1927 was 15 Labour to 9 Conservatives in Smethwick, 7 Labour to 14 Conservatives, 10 Liberals and 1 Independent in Walsall, whilst in Wolverhampton it was 13 Labour, 21 Conservatives, 11 Liberals and 7 Independents.(87) In 1928 Labour gained one seat in both Dudley and Wednesbury, but one was lost in Wolverhampton.(88)

It was only in Smethwick that the Labour Party made any major advance in municipal elections in the immediate post-war years. In both Walsall and Wolverhampton it was probably the strong presence of the Liberals, which held back Labour. Some care is needed, however, in making comparisons, as the borough franchise was more restricted, being still based on householders. Nevertheless there is no



evidence here to suggest that Labour was about to make a big advance in the 1929 General Election. A number of factors still seemed to be holding the party back in the late 1920's.

The opposition, in the form of the Black Country Conservative Associations, remained a force, although less of a threat than the 'well oiled' Birmingham Unionist's machine. The nature of many of the Black Country industries, such as coal mining, iron and steel and the metal working trades, gave less opportunity for the paternalistic approach, which had been common in Birmingham workshops. Apathy and the deference vote could still be relied upon. This applied to the many non-unionised members of the working class, for whom the Labour Party was seen as an offshoot of the trade unions.

The closest that Black Country Conservatives came to emulating the Birmingham Unionists was probably in Wolverhampton, which has been analysed by K.D.Gardner. The party here, however, was essentially based on the middle-class wards of the West constituency, having little organisation in the East. Nevertheless the party was quite skilled in appealing to working-class voters. Gardner shows how they adapted the methods of business to politics, especially in the development of the techniques of advertising and in the use of film. Furthermore the Conservatives continued Labour's housing programme, which enabled them to attract some working-class support. They were also adept at appealing to the newly enfranchised female voter, by calling special meetings and producing appealing leaflets.(89)

Labour's growth locally was made harder by the continued existence of anti-Socialist pacts between the Conservatives and Liberals. These were present in all the Black Country boroughs, but were particularly harmful to Labour in municipal elections in Wolverhampton, Walsall, Dudley and West Bromwich. The Conservatives and Liberals seemed to coalesce around a policy of resisting increased local expenditure, which threatened rate increases. For the 1927 municipal elections in Wolverhampton the Conservative and Liberal candidates actually stood as 'anti-Socialists'. Presumably it was better for propaganda purposes to use the word Socialist than Labour.

Meanwhile low individual membership remained a feature in most of the Black Country constituencies during this period. One reason for this, as noted by Riddell, was that in working-class regions most males sympathetic to Labour would be affiliated through their own union.(90) Low membership, however, tended to encourage the development of cliques and personal feuds, which characterised many of the local parties at this time. Yet in 1926, the year of the General Strike, membership rose in many constituencies. Bilston, for instance, recorded a return of £12, which



represented 1,440 members. Stourbridge had 500, Wednesbury 432, Walsall 360, Smethwick 335, Wolverhampton West 300 and West Bromwich 258.(91) With some exceptions these numbers were not maintained in the succeeding years.

The one notable exception was Bilston, which under the influence of its agent Sam Hague retained a large membership. The figures for the following years were:- 1927 – 780, 1928 – 700 and 1929 – 660. The only constituency party to equal this was Stourbridge, which appointed an agent during this period and had a popular parliamentary candidate in Wilfred Wellock. Individual membership here grew from 500 in 1927 to 600 in 1928 and 930 in 1929. The figures given for the other constituencies in the 1930 Annual Report were 378 for Kingswinford, 300 for Wolverhampton West and 240 for Smethwick. The remainder had the minimum figure of 180, except for Dudley, which recorded no return. Yet according to the 1930 Annual Report 47 constituencies across the country had over 1,000 individual members.(92) In this respect the Black Country Labour Parties resembled the trade union dominated ones in West Yorkshire, described by Reynolds and Laybourn.(93)

The Bilston Labour Party also included a particularly successful Women's Section. It was these women members that boosted the local party's overall membership figures, as they were less likely to be affiliated through a union. The Minute Book of the Bilston Section shows that the Women's Section held fortnightly meetings between 1926 and 1929. Subjects, which were discussed included nursery schools, unemployment, citizenship and birth control.(94) The section was sufficiently active during this period to be able to provide candidates and funds to fight local elections.(95) This in turn helped the local party to make progress in the Bilston Urban District Council Elections, as in 1928 when two seats were gained.(96)

In general, however, the figures suggest that individual membership of most local Labour Parties remained small, despite national attempts to increase it. However, an ILP element remained in many constituencies, often finding itself in conflict with the more right wing trade unionists within the local parties and even on Town Councils. This was certainly the case in Wolverhampton, where there was to be a continuation of splits and in-fighting between ILP members like Councillor Emma Sproson and the trade unionists in the local party. Trouble arose over a meeting in Wolverhampton in September 1926 addressed by Dr. Robert Dunstan, the former Labour Party member, who had stood as a Communist for Birmingham West in the 1924 Election. He was looking for support to set up a branch of the National Left Wing Movement. A number of Labour Party activists attended the meeting,



including Sydney Robinson and Emma Sproson, who both spoke in support. Both were criticised by the Executive Committee of the Wolverhampton West branch of the party.(97) In return Sproson resolved "that she would not again stand as a candidate for the Town Council for the party, but that she would run as an independent candidate".(98) This she did in the 1927 local election, only to lose her seat at Dunstall. Robinson, on the other hand, seems to have soon made his peace with the party, as he was elected vice chairman in March 1927.(99)

Internal disputes continued in 1928 over the voting records of local councillors despite the setting up of a Consultative Committee to decide policy. Three councillors and one alderman voted against the wishes of the Committee for a grant of £400 to the Roman Catholic College of St. Chads. A move was made in the Executive Committee to disband the Consultative Committee, allowing councillors to determine policy themselves. This was defeated and instead it was agreed that the non-councillors would decide the matter on the Committee.(100) This led to the resignation from the Labour group of two councillors, J.Davies and Miss M.Perry.(101)

The Smethwick Labour Party also had a strong ILP element within it, which included its trade-unionist MP, John Davison. In December 1925 a meeting of the local branch protested over the imprisonment of 12 Communists, demanding their immediate release. Alderman Willetts was one to protest, stating that he did not wish to defend the Communists, but their right to free speech. There were attacks on the local Trades Council over its attitude towards the Communist Party.(102)

A more serious difference occurred following the resignation in 1927 of the parliamentary agent for Smethwick, Councillor R.A.Baker. At first he kept his links with the Party, but then in October 1928 in an interview with the local press, he announced his resignation not just from the Party but also as a prospective Labour candidate for the Soho Ward, for which he was councillor. Instead he declared that he would contest the Spon Lane Ward as an Independent. He went on to tell the press that he was "sick of the intrigues and corruption one sees within the Labour movement".(103) It appears that Baker had been disciplined at a joint meeting of the local Executive Committee and the Labour group for speaking out on the policy of the Housing Committee and its Direct Labour Scheme without consulting colleagues. Asked to attend a further joint meeting, he failed to turn up and applied to join the Conservatives.(104)

Finance was the final serious constraint on the growth of the Labour Party during this period. In Wolverhampton, for instance, concern was expressed at an Executive Committee meeting on the 1<sup>st</sup>



January 1929 over “the falling off of affiliation fees from trade unions and the decrease in voluntary contributions collected in wards”. On the 3<sup>rd</sup> April, just before the General Election, ward treasurers emphasised the seriousness of the financial position and agreed “that a special appeal be issued for funds and that a request be made for loans to meet the position.”(105) The problem was that with low individual membership in the constituencies local parties were very dependent on the trade unions for financial support. Union membership, however, was at best static, whilst the Trade Union Act of 1927, which changed union affiliation from contracting out to contracting in, was estimated in the short term to have lost Labour a third of its income raised from the levy.(106) Savage and Miles have claimed that only around 51 per cent of trade union members ‘contracted in’ after 1927, with the figure as low as 24% for the AEU.(107) The financial situation was such that some local parties turned to wealthy parliamentary candidates, which partly explains the appointment of Oswald Mosley in Smethwick and Oliver Baldwin in Dudley. In 1928, for instance, the newly elected Mosley paid the £337 salary of an agent in Smethwick.(108)

#### **B. THE WALSALL BY-ELECTION 1925**

The first serious test for Labour during this period came with the parliamentary by-election in Walsall on 27<sup>th</sup> February 1925. The election was called because of the disqualification of Billy Preston under a law, which prevented people who traded with the government from sitting in parliament. The matter was described as a ‘technicality’ by the Conservatives, but on the eve of the poll Labour was to issue a special leaflet, stating that the ‘technicality’ had been enacted to prevent MPs from “voting contracts and money to themselves”. Labour promised to extend the law to include directors of limited companies.(109)

At first the Walsall Labour Party Executive Committee refused to endorse Gladstone Small, who had contested the seat in 1924, on the grounds that “their financial resources were exhausted”.(110) Instead they wanted to consult Labour Headquarters over a new candidate. Before this could happen, however, the rank and file readopted Small, following a specially convened delegate meeting of the local Labour Party.(111) This action suggests a split in the notoriously factious Walsall Party. This appears to be confirmed when, at an early election meeting addressed by James Maxton, the leader of the ILP faction in parliament, many prominent local leaders did not attend. The local press, however, claimed that those “who had gone expecting to hear fiery utterances were disappointed, the Clyde member making a



speech which contained little beyond the usual Socialistic platitudes".(112) The episode reflects a division between the moderate trade union establishment and the more radical rank and file in the local party.

Preston unashamedly boasted of his position as the local candidate, but his limitations were recognised by The Times, which wrote that "he has not gone in great detail into political questions".(113) He was backed by the former Walsall MP, Sir Richard Cooper, whilst Baldwin, himself, sent a letter warning of "the menace of Socialism" and the need for the electorate to show "continued firmness".(114) Preston, who modelled his style on Baldwin, also used his wife to warn women voters of the threat of "strikes and revolution".(115)

The Liberals saw themselves as the main challengers as Pat Collins had held the seat in 1922 and 1923. They selected a strong candidate in T.J.MacNamara, who had been Minister of Labour in the Lloyd George Coalition Government, where he had been responsible for introducing safeguarding. His first task as candidate was to convince the electorate that Pat Collins had not been pushed out but had retired on health grounds.(116) Collins had been a popular local candidate and a Catholic, which had helped him in a seat with an estimated 5-8,000 Catholic voters.(117) MacNamara, on the other hand, was a Nonconformist, who campaigned as a Free Trader and anti-Socialist. He claimed that the electorate wanted "neither stagnant Toryism nor revolutionary Socialism".(118) Yet the Liberals were not as well organised as the Conservatives, whilst a visit from Lloyd George offered no new policies.(119) MacNamara did make a special appeal to the miners, on the grounds of the 1919 Sankey Report, which he felt offered a middle way between employers and employed.(120)

The main issues in the campaign were to be unemployment and housing. Walsall still had a workless total of 7,000, due to the decline of its traditional industries of leather and mining.(121) Labour was to make an issue of the Government's policy on unemployment benefit, claiming that "60,000 men have been deprived of the dole and during the year increasing numbers of the workless will be cut off from insurance benefit".(122) A strong rumour went round, suggesting that workers would need more stamps on their insurance cards to claim unemployment benefit. Preston strongly denied this along with other rumours that the Government intended abolishing the miner's seven hours day and reducing the wages of railwaymen by 6 shillings a week.(123)

The growing friction between the Government and the trade unions was seen in housing policy. Neville Chamberlain was proposing to build steel houses for the homeless, using "unskilled men now



walking the streets". This was likely to bring the Government into conflict with the building trade unions, which had resisted a similar proposal from MacNamara, when he was in the Lloyd George Coalition. A letter was sent to Small from Ramsay MacDonald, defending the trade union position, by claiming that the Government was making "unjustifiable attacks upon trade unions, which are unwilling to allow the need for houses to lower their standards of living".(124)

It was felt in some quarters that Small was too highly educated to appeal to the miners, railwaymen and other workers in the constituency. The Birmingham Post claimed that "he seems to suffer from the defects of his good qualities and attainments".(125) A more serious embarrassment came when rumours were spread about his divorce, claiming that he had deserted his wife and three children. Small was forced to issue a statement, pointing out that his divorce was on the grounds of "technical desertion required by Scottish law", due to "incompatibility of temperament".(126) The significance of the matter was pointed out by the Birmingham Gazette, which claimed that many Catholics had "withdrawn Mr Small's cards from their windows", following this statement.(127)

Meanwhile the local Conservatives further stirred up matters, when the Walsall Unionist Association issued a leaflet entitled 'Socialism destroys Marriage'.(128) Amongst its many claims were that religion would be stamped out, Bolshevism established and marriage made a civil contract of convenience. The leaflet was much derided by MacDonald on a visit to the constituency. The Labour leader summed up the situation by claiming that the electors had a choice between "active reaction, active progress and a dead corpse".(129)

The Labour campaign was certainly hit by this campaign, with the Town Crier calling the election "the dirtiest fight in twenty years".(130) The paper claimed that Labour canvassers originally thought that their candidate would win by a few hundred votes. The result, however, was a victory for Preston by over 2,000 votes with Labour coming third, which was a similar result to 1924. Small had some consolation in that the Labour vote was the only one to increase, although MacNamara considered his vote "reasonable" considering the short time he had had in the constituency.(131)

### C. THE SMETHWICK BY-ELECTION 1926

The region's most dramatic political event of the period came at the end of the year with the appointment of Oswald Mosley to fight the Smethwick by-election for Labour. On 21<sup>st</sup> November John Davison informed the executive of the local Trades and Labour Council that he intended to resign on



health grounds and that he had asked Mosley to consider an invitation to contest the seat.(132) Mosley agreed to the proposal and the executive interviewed him. He was recommended for adoption ahead of a full meeting of the Trades and Labour Council. The National Agent was informed, but the executive went ahead without consulting the NEC, since they regarded the case as an emergency.

The Council discussed the situation on 23<sup>rd</sup> November. Two local men, Aldermen Willetts and Betts, felt they had some claim to be approached as possible candidates, but a motion inviting them to address the Council along with Mosley was defeated. Instead Mosley alone was invited to address the Council, after which he was unanimously adopted as candidate. Both Willetts and Betts agreed to abide by the decision and shook hands with Mosley after the vote was taken.(133)

It has been claimed that Mosley had become alienated from his background on account of his experiences in the First World War and by a humanitarian desire to see full employment and decent living conditions for the British people.(134) It was this, which was to lead him to adopt Keynesian economic policies. He questioned the remedies of economic liberalism, calling for an expansion in production by making use of the nation's unused capacity whilst increasing demand by raising wage levels and expanding credit. In particular he saw the banking system as the enemy, calling for its nationalisation and the rise of national credit. These ideas were put forward at an ILP conference at Gloucester in April 1925 and became known as the 'Birmingham Proposals'.

Mosley was to play an active part in the General Strike, although he did not personally approve of this type of action.(135) He was even more active in support of the miners' strike, speaking regularly at rallies and donating lavishly to their cause. It gave him a power base amongst trade unions, which was to secure him election to the NEC in 1927, 1928 and 1930. Mosley also had good relations with MacDonald, who was ever keen to broaden the party's support. He had, however, also made a number of enemies, especially amongst the party leadership.(136)

The manner of Mosley's selection forced the National Executive to intervene, arguing that the situation was not an emergency and normal procedures had not been followed. The chairman of the National Labour Party, Frank Roberts, and the National Agent, Egerton Wake, visited Smethwick with the intention of persuading Davison to continue. With this objective not possible pressure was put on the local party to back down. Instead the move drew the Council closer together in resistance to the NEC.(137) Mosley, in an article in the Town Crier, justified his candidacy, by pointing out that



Smethwick was a neighbouring constituency to Ladywood and would enable him to continue his work in the Midlands.(138)

The local Conservative press was anxious to prove that Mosley was chosen because of his ability to finance his own campaign. It was stated that the local Trades Council and unions had “no money to spare”.(139) The Birmingham Post interviewed a member of the Trades Council, who said:- “Many of the older Labour leaders in the town... are frankly disgusted with the method in which Mr Mosley was adopted”. He went on to say that in addition to Mosley the names of four other local men were mentioned. In each case it was a question of:- “Has he got the money to fight the seat? What it boils down to is that Mr Mosley had the money and others hadn’t and so it was Mr Mosley who was chosen”.(140)

This conclusion was not strictly accurate since the Birmingham Gazette pointed out that if Willetts had been selected he would have been backed by the Birmingham Co-operative Society, “who would be prepared to finance him to a large extent”.(141) It may be that the powerful ILP faction in the local party were still disgruntled with the NEC over its attitude to members of the Communist Party. The Town Crier, for instance, defended the Council by pointing to the example of the selection of O.G.Willey as candidate for West Birmingham, following the expulsion of Dr Dunstan, the Communist, who was the 1924 candidate. The National Agent was quoted as having said at the Party Conference of that choice, that they “dared not interfere with the right of the local parties to choose their own candidate”.(142)

Skidelsky claims that Mosley was chosen, “because he was a brilliant, exciting and dangerous campaigner, a candidate with rare charisma and an exceptional electoral record”.(143) However, opposition to the selection appears to have come from some union branches. A letter was sent to the NEC by John Beard, secretary of the Workers’ Union, expressing dissatisfaction with the procedure adopted by the Smethwick Trades and Labour Council and urging that “facilities should be given to all locally affiliated bodies to nominate candidates for the impending vacancy”.(144) The Smethwick Telephone also reported that Alderman Willetts had spoken out against the local executive on constitutional grounds, urging the need to recognise the authority of headquarters. The Town Crier, however, reckoned that “if there were any waverers over the selection of Mr Mosley, the action of the National Executive has brought them round as one man in support of the local executive position”.(145)



Opposition to Mosley also came from within the national leadership. Philip Snowden, for instance, warned the party “not to degenerate into an instrument for the ambitions of wealthy men” and referred to candidatures being “put up to auction by the local Labour Party and sold to the highest bidder”. Herbert Morrison also warned against Mosley in the New Leader.(146) The NEC, however, resolved “that the party emphatically repudiate the statements made in the capitalist press and elsewhere that the National Executive has been in any way actuated in its attitude to the impending by-election by any personal feelings, respecting the claims of Mr Oswald Mosley”.(147)

Given Mosley’s undoubted popularity the NEC quickly agreed to a compromise. First, however, it was resolved to secure assurances from Mosley that he was “prepared to accept and abide by the Constitution of the Party”.(148) Then on 5<sup>th</sup> December a special selection conference, which included four representatives of the NEC, was held in Smethwick with the express purpose of readopting Mosley.(149) It was reported that “not a single voice (was) raised in opposition to Mosley” and that “all the speakers paid fine tributes to Mosley’s sincerity and ability as a fighter for the workers’ cause”. As there were no other nominations, a motion to adopt Mosley was carried unanimously “amid great enthusiasm”. Mosley, himself, gave a short speech, concluding that “the day the Mail ceases to abuse me is the day to get rid of me. While I am being abused by the capitalist press, I know that I am doing effective work for the Labour cause”.(150)

The election which followed proved to be one of the rowdiest of the inter-war period. This was largely due to the fact that the campaign attracted the national press, which was to become obsessed with Mosley and his wife. The Conservatives saw him as a class traitor, since he was an aristocrat, who championed the cause of the working class. Furthermore, whereas the Labour leadership of MacDonald and Henderson were seen as offering “a reasonable approach”, Mosley was accused of stirring up class hatred and seeking “in civil troubles the readiest way to power”.(151)

The Manchester Guardian summed up the press’s fascination with Mosley in this way:- “One would have thought that there were here sufficiently realistic issues but little enough attention to these issues seems to be given by the writers about the campaign. Mr Mosley and his wife are, unfortunately, perfect material for those who want nothing but ‘stunts’. What do they eat, what do they drink, wherewithal are they clothed are the most important issues. When Mr Mosley lived in a Birmingham hotel, they attested to his aristocratic aversion to ugliness; now that he has moved to a small room in Smethwick, his hypocrisy becomes clear”.(152)



The Town Crier described the campaign against Mosley as “vile and contemptible” and based on “lies and vulgar abuse”.(153) The Birmingham Gazette, however, believed that Mosley had provoked the treatment by compensating “for his handicap of unearned wealth and his lack of personal experience of the worker’s daily life... (with) violent denunciation of the possessing classes”.(154)

Ironically Mosley was opposed by two candidates, who could claim working-class roots. J.Marshall Pike, the Conservative, was a former railwayman but now employed in Conservative Central Office, whilst the Liberal, Edwin Bayliss, was the son of a miner.(155) Pike, who had been the candidate in 1924, campaigned on the success of the government’s record in reducing unemployment in Smethwick, which in April was the lowest since 1920.(156) One firm, he claimed, which had employed 400 in 1924, now regularly employed more than 2,000. He also pointed to the provision of widows’ and orphans’ pensions and the cut in the qualifying age for old age pensions from 70 to 65.(157)

Bayliss was portrayed as “the real working-class candidate” by the Birmingham Gazette, although he was now on the distribution staff of the Nottingham Journal.(158) The Liberals, however, had never fought the Smethwick seat before and not all their members agreed with the decision to fight it now. Alderman Pinkney decided to stay neutral, claiming that “the only effect of running a candidate will be to swell the Socialist majority”.(159) According to The Times some Liberals were supporting Pike.(160) This would be in accordance with their stand in local elections, where they were in an anti-Socialist pact with the Conservatives.

The election took place at a time when striking miners were returning to work on reduced wages.(161) In these circumstances Mosley put special emphasis in his campaign on a statement refuted to have been made by Baldwin on the 30<sup>th</sup> June 1925, in which he said that “all the workers have got to face a reduction in wages”.(162) Although denied by Baldwin himself, Mosley went on to reiterate the claim, quoting him as saying that “in order to compete with the world either the conditions of labour, hours or wages , will have to be altered in this country”.(163) Large posters were put up by Mosley’s supporters attributing the statement to Baldwin and adding that “higher wages lead to prosperity; lower wages lead to ruin”.(164)

Pike attacked the so called ‘wages lie’, claiming to The Times reporter that “there was never anything meaner than the lie the Socialists are trying to foist upon the electors of Smethwick”.(165) The Birmingham Post accused Mosley of abandoning “the ordinary decencies of political life. Starting to win Smethwick by gross misrepresentation he has now committed himself to winning it ... by an



audacious falsehood... To speak quite plainly a man with such standards is out of his elements in British politics".(166)

Mosley also claimed that the Government was planning attacks on trade unions by passing legislation to restrict their freedom. Pike strongly denied these charges, but there appears to be some discrepancy over what he stood for. The Times declared that he would vote against any alteration in the constitution of trade unions, except for opting in on the political levy.(167) The Birmingham Post, however, claimed that he also supported secret ballots on strikes and restrictions on mass picketing.(168) Pike was fully backed by Baldwin in a letter, which warned of "Socialists, who pose as leaders of Labour without a shred of qualification for that position".(169)

The problem for Pike, however, was the difficulty he faced in getting his message across, due to the uproar at his meetings. The Birmingham Gazette, which claimed that his meetings sounded from the outside like "a dog show", thought that he was making the mistake "of confusing the Smethwick Labour movement with Communism".(170) The Times, however, blamed "a large number of Socialists, wearing rosettes... (who) sought to assume control of the proceedings... howled down the speakers and threw handfuls of Socialist handbills among the audience".(171)

The presence of the London press corps also appeared to arouse high feelings, encouraged by Mosley's own attacks on the press lords.(172) An amazing scene took place at a Labour women's meeting at the Theatre Royal, when a crowd of 20 or 30 women stormed the press box, "hammering on the door with clenched fists, breaking one of the glass panels before being eventually repelled". Then on leaving the building, the pressmen had to walk through "a lane of women shouting abuse", whilst one received "a sharp blow to the head which knocked him against the wall".(173)

Trouble also broke out in the streets with Pike accusing Mosley of stealing his lunchtime pitches outside factories. When Pike tried to make a similar move uproar broke out. One woman Conservative speaker was reported "lying seriously ill with a broken rib after being struck when leaving a meeting".(174) At a final Conservative demonstration, attended by four MPs, disorder broke out with none of the speakers able to speak. When the crowd "retired to the Blue Gates Hotel... Mosley conducted them through three verses of the Red Flag".(175)

Mosley continued to secure the backing of MacDonald, who confirmed this in a letter:- "The spluttering, vitriolic personal attacks that the Tories have made upon you should make you so secure that assistance and commendations are quite unnecessary. You stand as a living proof of the fact that



the Labour Party is not a class party and adherence to it is not determined by what a man has but what he thinks".(176) MacDonald backed this up by attending a rally at Smethwick on the 16<sup>th</sup> December, when he addressed a crowd of 15,000 at Victoria Park, stressing that what he looked for in colleagues was not their background but what they believed in.(177)

A final attempt to tarnish Mosley was made when the Conservative press widely reported support for him from the Communist Party. Prominent members of the party were reported to be active in Smethwick, whilst a party meeting was held at the Smethwick Baths on the 19<sup>th</sup> December.(178) The Labour agent, R.A.Baker, hastened to issue a statement denying that the meeting had any connection with the Labour Party.(179)

In the end Mosley won with a majority of 6,582 on an 80 per cent poll.(180) Addressing a crowd of 8,000, he praised his supporters for having "beaten the press of reaction".(181) Pike put his defeat down to having "to contend with systematic rowdyism and the now notorious wages lie".(182) Most of the press agreed that the Labour organisation was much superior to that of the other parties. The Times wrote that "the Socialist campaign has been carried out with extreme efficiency... the organisation is one that would gratify any candidate, and there has been no lack of voluntary helpers... Almost every house displays a portrait of the Labour candidate".(183)

The Birmingham Gazette claimed that Mosley not only had "a vastly stronger organisation and more resources", but also "voiced the current dissatisfaction more vigorously".(184) Presumably this was a reference to the coal dispute, where miners were returning to work on reduced wages. The Birmingham Post stressed the strength of the Labour organisation, comparing it favourably with the Conservative's, which was "relatively ineffective" and failed to keep order at Pike's meetings. The paper also admitted that the press campaign against Mosley backfired:- "They flung against Mr Mosley a torrent of abuse... They produced a reaction in his favour. From an aggressor they converted him into a victim".(185) This view was backed by a local party worker, who claimed that the press campaign was worth at least 2,000 votes for Mosley.(186)

The Town Crier took a similar view, reckoning that "the Smethwick Trades and Labour Council ought to pass a vote of thanks to Lords Rothermere and Beaverbrook for the valuable assistance they have rendered to Labour's cause". They also thought that Mosley articulated well the Labour case on wages:- "His vast audiences listened eagerly to his brilliant speeches and cheered him as they have never before cheered a Labour candidate".(187)

Following the by-election the NEC discussed a report that Mosley had stated that he “had no confidence in Head Office and had no intention of working or communicating with them”. They resolved to appoint a sub committee to review with him “in a frank and friendly manner, the whole situation in the Midlands, more particularly as it had arisen in connection with the Smethwick by-election”.(188)

It is easy with hindsight to see in Mosley’s campaign the signs of latent fascism. The demagogic style, coupled with the repetition of points like ‘the wages lie’, are typical of this. Even at this time not everybody within the local party was swayed by Mosley. The chairman, W.E.Lawrence, warned of the dangers of personalising the campaign:- “Labour means to deal with principles not personalities. My advice is never to indulge in mudslinging. Work wholeheartedly for Labour not Oswald Mosley”.(189) The retiring MP John Davison also warned:- “The cause is greater than the man. I appeal to you not to be led away by personalities”.(190)

#### D. THE STOURBRIDGE BY-ELECTION 1927

During 1926 the Conservatives lost three by-elections and in 1927 a further three. One of these was to be at Stourbridge, where Wilfred Wellock captured the seat for Labour with a majority of over 3,000. Yet this was a constituency with no tradition of Labour success. The Liberals had held the seat until 1922 and it was only in 1924 that Labour had managed second place. The constituency, which stretched from Stourbridge to Oldbury, was described by The Times as having “an extraordinary variety of industries carried on in a scattered collection of villages and small towns, which have little cohesion. Iron and steel works, fire clay works, forges and collieries provide employment, which is in the main skilled or semi-skilled. Most of the works are small or moderate in size, with the result that there is personal contact between employers and their men”.(191)

Pielou, the deceased Conservative MP, had been a popular local candidate partly on account of his war record, which had given him a strong hold on the ex-servicemen’s vote. It was generally felt that personality would be a factor in the election. The Conservative candidate, H.C.Hogbin, had only recently joined the party, having stood in the 1922 Parliament as a National Liberal. It was in March 1926 that he had severed his links with the Liberals, writing to Asquith that the Party no longer provided “strenuous opposition to the pernicious doctrines of Socialism”. Nevertheless he was the unanimous choice of the local Conservatives, who were said to be “in good spirits with a vigorous and



active organisation". It was felt, however, that the government's record put the local Conservatives on the defensive, whilst having a candidate, who was new to the constituency, was considered a handicap.(192)

The Labour Party was likely to benefit from having their candidate, Wilfred Wellock, working in the constituency for four years, as well as from the effects of Mosley's campaign in nearby Smethwick. The thrust of Wellock's programme seemed to be orthodox Labour policy. He advocated the nationalisation of the mines, transport, electricity and banking, whilst condemning the government for legislating in the interests of "the powerful and privileged few".(193)

As a wartime conscientious objector and editor of the pacifist paper The Crusader, Wellock was in a strong position to attack the government's recent decision to send troops to Shanghai to protect British lives there. The Labour Party condemned the move as likely to lead to war. George Lansbury, speaking in the constituency, thought that the Chinese question was "the supreme issue in the by-election" and described British policy as one of "piracy and plunder".(194) Wellock, himself, produced a leaflet warning against war in China. "War is Hell! Why walk into it? Vote against war. Vote for Wellock", it explained. Hogbin, on the other hand, claimed that the troops were sent to protect our kith and kin as well as our property in Shanghai".(195) Baldwin sent him a letter justifying the government's action on the grounds that it was the duty of the government "to protect lives and interests of British subjects in any part of the world".(196)

Wellock also claimed that the government was following "a low wages policy" and had done little but "back up the coal owners and other capitalists" since coming to power.(197) He pointed to Baldwin's intention to amend the trade union law, following the General Strike. In a speech in the constituency MacDonald made much of this along with the government's failure to help the million plus, who were unemployed.(198) Hogbin responded by claiming that "Mr Baldwin has given his word that he will not interfere with the rights of trade unionists and his intention is to strengthen and improve the trade unions in their legislative function".(199) He even had a poster declaring "Vote for Hogbin and stronger Trade Unions".(200)

A key factor in the constituency was the Liberal vote, which was thought to be in decline. However, the Liberal candidate, Glyn Edwards, was said to be having "some very good meetings". A letter was received from Lloyd George, claiming that "the country is Liberal to the core" and "already the tide is turning".(201) Hogbin made an appeal to Liberal voters, claiming that the contest was between

Socialism and the Constitution. Baldwin's letter too called for electors to "strike an effective blow at those whose avowed object is the overthrow of our existing Constitution and the substitution for it of the so called 'Dictatorship of the Proletariat'".(202) Labour, meanwhile, in a final poster claimed that a vote for Edwards "is a vote thrown away on a dead party and a dying cause", whilst a vote for Hogbin would "help the Government blunder into war and will be a vote for lower pay and longer hours".(203)

The result was a Labour victory with a swing of over 7 per cent.(204) Wellock stressed that the main issues had been "the low wage policy so disastrously pursued by the Government and the situation in China".(205) He pointed to the advantage, which four years of work in the constituency had brought. In particular membership of the local party had increased nearly fourfold during this period to reach 500 at the time of the election.(206) Also unlike Smethwick the London press had left Stourbridge alone so that "Labour speakers and Labour organisations had been able to put the constructive case for Socialism".(207)

A different interpretation has been made by G.H.Bennett in a study of by-elections in the Midlands during this period.(208) He points to a letter sent by Hogbin to Baldwin in which he ascribes Labour's success to "the fact that both workers and employers have been thoroughly disappointed over the working of the Safeguarding of Industries Act".(209) He also quotes from a letter in The Times, which claimed that there was a lack of MPs in the constituency, speaking in support of the Conservative candidate.(210) Yet the author points out that in fact as many as 25 Conservative MPs had spoken there, but "the writer's perception is revealing nevertheless".(211)

## E. ECONOMIC BACKGROUND

As the 1929 General Election approached the Labour Party in the Black Country seemed to have good prospects of success. The issue, which seemed likely to dominate the campaign, was unemployment. Yet its impact on voting habits at this time is difficult to assess. This is because there was much variation in the unemployment level in the Black Country. Wolverhampton, for instance, was experiencing an economic revival similar to that in Birmingham and Coventry, due to the growth of the car industry and its components. At Bushbury the newly established Goodyear Tyre factory was employing nearly 1,500 workers. Courtaulds had also set up in the town, manufacturing artificial fibres.(212)



There was a similar situation in towns like Smethwick, Oldbury and Darlaston, which all had unemployment rates of below 9 per cent in December 1927.(213) There were said, for instance, to be 3,000 people making aluminium castings for the motor trade at Smethwick. Darlaston's low unemployment rate was due to the manufacture of motor pressings and car wheels, whilst Oldbury was doing well on account of its chemical and tube works.(214)

Yet there were still many signs of economic depression in the Black Country during the late 1920's, due to the continued decline of the region's traditional industries of coal mining, iron and steel and chainmaking. In 1913 there had been 10,000 coal miners in the region, producing 3 million tons of coal. By 1926 there were 6,500 miners producing 1.3 million tons. Flooding and exhaustion were the major factors behind this decline, exacerbated by the industrial disputes of the early 1920's, which affected pumping operations. The decline was greatest in the thick coal seams of Tipton, Rowley Regis and Old Hill, leaving half of production from three deep mines on the fringes of the region.(215)

The iron and steel industry in the region was also suffering from depression. Much of the coal and iron ore was now being transported into the region, making the cost of assembling the materials around £2 a ton. Output dropped to about ¼ million tons a year between 1922-27, which was only half the 1914 level.(216) Wrought iron production experienced an absolute decline in the early 1920's with the output of puddled bars falling from 1.2 million in 1913 to 0.3 million in 1924.(217) Meanwhile steel production became confined to three large works, whilst there was much evidence that semi-manufactured steel was being imported by local metal trades, probably making up 80% of the total.(218)

A number of the specialist Black Country trades were also experiencing a decline at this time. The hand chain industry and nail production were both hit by a combination of imports and new production techniques. The enamelled hollowware trade was suffering from a loss of pre-war markets and an increase in imports. It was also adjusting to new products such as motor and electrical castings or bath and sanitary wares. Similarly the leather trade in Walsall was forced to switch from saddles, harnesses and whips to fancy leather goods, motor accessories and sports equipment.(219)

Unemployment was highest in those towns, which were slowest in adapting to new developments. Thus in December 1927 the rate was over 12 per cent in towns such as Dudley, Tipton, Cradley Heath, Bilston and Brierley Hill, whilst in Wednesbury the rate was the highest at 18.3 per cent.(220) Certainly the evidence suggests that support for Labour was stronger in these towns, although it was



even stronger in Smethwick, which had low unemployment at this time. It seems more likely that the Labour Party's success in the region would depend more on its links with the trade union movement than with the level of unemployment.

Nevertheless the Conservatives saw Safeguarding as their best policy for wooing working class voters in the region and the key to electoral success. Safeguarding was held to be under threat from a future Labour Government with its consequent risk to employment. The Times claimed in a survey of the region that "the whole area, employers and workers, is looking anxiously into the question". Posters carrying the slogan 'Sow safeguarding and reap prosperity' were widely displayed.(221) Although most local industries were geared to the domestic market, they were vulnerable to cheap imports. With tariffs, however, they would be safe from any reciprocal action, unlike those that relied on exports like the Lancashire cotton industry. On the other hand many of the metal working industries were now using cheap imported iron and steel at the expense of local manufacturers.

The Unionist Birmingham Post backed the Conservatives by pointing to the new jobs created by Safeguarding. In Wolverhampton, for instance, they claimed that there were 5,000 more jobs in the town than in 1924, due to the safeguarding of the motor industry.(222) They pointed to the Goodyear Tyre factory, Courtaulds and Orme Evans Ltd., which made enamelled hollowware, an industry "which a few years ago was very seriously threatened by the unfair competition from abroad".(223) In Walsall the local Conservative MP was reported as saying with regard to the benefits of Safeguarding, that "it is difficult to get men for the particular job to be done".(224) Similarly in West Bromwich the Conservative candidate reported that where Safeguarding had been tried "employment has increased, work has become more regular, wages higher and selling prices lower".(225)

In Dudley the Conservative MP, Cyril Lloyd, was reported as "an out and out supporter of the policy of the protection of British industry and wages".(226) He was in favour of extending the list of safeguarded industries to include the iron and steel works at Brierley Hill, which was reported "at a low ebb for want of protection against sweated continental labour".(227) Meanwhile the recently safeguarded hollowware industry in Lye was "working full shifts, all stocks cleared and most of the manufacturers... considering putting down new machinery and adding to wages".(228)

Officially the Labour Party denounced Safeguarding on the same grounds as the Liberals, claiming that it would lead to an increase in prices, especially for food and raw materials. This would threaten those metal trades that were dependent on imported steel. The Times, however, accused Liberal and



Labour candidates of having little to say on the subject.(229) W.J.Brown, the Labour candidate for Wolverhampton West, accepted the benefits of Safeguarding and admitted that he would not support their removal.(230) Charlie Sitch, MP for Kingswinford, where the chainmakers of Cradley Heath were particularly badly hit by unemployment, was equivocal, admitting that “a strong case can be put for safeguarding a particular industry but... a tax in the last resort means higher prices to the consumer”.(231)

It appears that the Conservatives failed to persuade the electorate of their case, as in the 1929 General Election Labour won 9 of the 10 Black Country seats, whilst the Liberals retained Wolverhampton East. It left the Conservatives with no MPs in the region, leaving Labour with its best result here in the inter-war years.

## F. THE 1929 GENERAL ELECTION

### 1. WOLVERHAMPTON WEST

In a survey of the Wolverhampton constituencies, The Times reckoned that Sir Robert Bird would find it difficult to hold his seat in the West division, despite the constituency being “full of the very interests, which have gained under Safeguarding”. One of their explanations was the increase in the trade union vote, due to the new factories that had been set up. Also the presence of a Liberal candidate after years of abstention was thought to have made the situation less predictable.(232) The decision to put up a Liberal candidate at this election appears to have been due to pressure from the local branch of the Young Liberals.(233)

The Labour candidate was again W.J.Brown, who was already showing an independent line on policy. He reckoned that the Labour programme for unemployment, “however good and necessary” was not “a final solution to the unemployment problem”. He wanted to see three other proposals: - “decent old age pensions, raising the school leaving age by one year and the introduction of a seven hour (working) day”.(234) Brown’s criticism of the 1924 Labour Government in his union journal, Red Tape, provided ammunition for Bird. Brown had said then that “the government’s treatment of pledges had been deplorable” and that “its biggest failure is in unemployment; of the seriousness of that failure there can be no doubt”.(235) Bird also questioned Brown’s recent visit to Russia.(236)

Brown concentrated on what he considered to be the main campaign issues:- “Peace and the condition of the people ... at the end of four and a half years of Conservative rule”.(237) One topic he

was determined to make an issue of was housing, describing the slums of Monmore Green as “a place where a rich man would not keep his dog or horse in”.(238) Labour supporters were active in shouting down Bird, so that at a meeting of women voters, he was unable to answer questions due to the singing of the Red Flag.(239)

Brown won with a majority of nearly 4,000. The Wolverhampton Express and Star special correspondent reckoned that the intervention of a Liberal was decisive, as their candidate secured over 4,500 votes. Brown, himself, put his victory down to a desire to remove “class government” and set up “a social system more closely representative of their own conceptions of social righteousness”.(240) Samuel Bowers, the West Wolverhampton Conservative agent, later gave a list of reasons for his Party’s defeat. Amongst these were the government’s failure to reduce unemployment, the lack of an inspiring policy, epitomised by the ‘Safety First’ slogan and the Liberal intervention. He laid no blame on Bird.(241)

## 2. WOLVERHAMPTON EAST

The Wolverhampton East constituency was a different matter. The secret of Liberal success here, which dated back to 1832, was touched upon by The Times in its survey of the Wolverhampton constituencies. On the one hand there was the tradition of Free Trade amongst the locksmiths of Willenhall. Here “hundreds of small manufacturers” working in “little backyard shops” were concerned for “their supply of cheap iron and steel”. The report also pointed to the fact that Wolverhampton was a stronghold of Non Conformity. “The vote from the chapels is perhaps not so big a proportion of the electorate as it used to be, but it is a steady foundation”. This time the Liberals had a new candidate, due to the retirement of the MP, George Thorne. Geoffrey Mander, like his predecessor, was a strong local personality, being described as a chairman of a board of directors with a reputation as “generous employers of labour.”(242)

The Labour Party had a poor record in this constituency, partly owing to the lapsed tradition whereby in parliamentary elections they kept out of this contest, whilst being given a free hand to fight the Conservatives in the West division. Many workers in the constituency, however, were employed at the Goodyear Tyre factory just over the border. It was also felt that Mander had not “the close touch with local trade unions, which Mr Thorne had”.(243) The Labour candidate, D.R.Williams, also made



much of the irony that in 1918 Lloyd George had opened his election campaign in Wolverhampton by appealing to the local people to turn out George Thorne.(244)

The Conservative candidate, Buchan-Hepburn, fought a strongly Protectionist campaign. Leo Amery, who was invited to speak in the constituency to stress the importance of Empire Trade, described Mander and the Liberal Free Traders as “crazy theorists”.(245) It was claimed that Safeguarding would lead to an increase of only ½d on a gross of keys.(246) A meeting was arranged, at which ex-Liberals confessed to joining the Conservatives, because they considered that by the policy of Safeguarding, “the British worker would be protected against unfair foreign competition”.(247)

Yet both the Conservatives and Labour had weak organisations in this division, with the former having temporarily closed theirs down in 1928.(248) Thus it was the Liberals, who once again emerged supreme, with a majority of over 5,000. Mander put his success down to the “inexhaustible stronghold of Liberalism in East Wolverhampton” and the support of his predecessor and other Liberal workers throughout the constituency. Williams put Labour’s defeat down to the fact that “we had no money to spend in the division”.(249) Indeed the Birmingham Post described the Labour effort as “comparatively feeble”.(250) Nevertheless Williams did increase the Labour vote by around 75%, although the Liberals increased their total support by even more.

### 3. BILSTON

In Bilston both the Conservatives and the Liberals selected popular local candidates. Major Thompson, the Conservative, was appointed on the advice of Central Office.(251) He was considered a moderate, who put much emphasis on the need for “the harmonising of industry” and “a spirit of co-operation between employers and employed”.(252) It was thought by The Times that the intervention of a Liberal, Gilbert Salter, would “undoubtedly harm the Labour Party’s chances” and might even be “sufficient to defeat Mr Baker”.(253)

It has, however, already been pointed out that Bilston was one constituency, in which both membership and organisation had improved considerably.(254) This certainly proved to be an advantage to Baker, especially as it included an active Women’s Section. This encouraged him to appeal to the important female vote, by stressing social reforms such as improved maternity and child welfare.(255) Baker’s majority rose to over 5,000, which was the largest for either Party during the

period. He put the reasons for his success down partly to dissatisfaction with the Government and partly to “growing enthusiasm amongst the workers ” for better representation in Parliament.(256)

#### 4. DUDLEY

The Dudley constituency attracted national attention, since the Labour candidate was the Prime Minister’s son, Oliver Baldwin, who had been nursing the seat since his defeat in 1924. Unlike Bilston the local Labour Party here was short of members and funds, which probably made them thankful to have a candidate of independent means.(257) As a contrast the Birmingham Mail reported the Conservative organisation as being “near perfect as possible”, with the local branch of the Primrose League having a membership of about 1,600.(258) The Times too considered the Conservative MP Cyril Lloyd the likely winner, on account of his strong local business interests in the iron and steel industry.(259)

Baldwin, however, proved to be a popular candidate, arousing “tremendous enthusiasm” in the mining ward of Lower Gornal, according to the local press.(260) In his election address he put much emphasis on support for the League of Nations and disarmament, whilst in his campaign he stressed the need for adequate pensions, raising the school leaving age and better housing. He put unemployment as his first priority, claiming that only Labour had a cure for it.(261) During the campaign he was forced to confess to being a capitalist, declaring that “he would be willing to work, when he would be sure that the money he earned would not go into the pocket of some private individual”.(262)

Lloyd put much emphasis on Safeguarding, which The Times believed was making headway across the region.(263) He also attacked nationalisation, warning of the “heavier taxation”, which he predicted it would bring. He dismissed Labour’s policies as “unsound and impracticable”.(264) There was uproar, however, over his claim that wages had not been reduced under the Conservatives.(265)

The Liberal candidate fought as an out and out Free Trader, promising to remove all tariffs.(266) The Times, however, reported that nowhere was there a sign of “the Liberal unemployment policy ... making headway”.(267) Baldwin was to secure a victory with a majority of over 3,000. It was reported that the local party was so short of funds that the campaign had cost it less than £100.(268) Lloyd put his defeat down to “misguided poverty”, claiming that his opponent had raised expectations, “which he will find hard to fulfil”.(269) It was also thought that the intervention of the Liberals, who secured only 15.5 per cent of the vote, was a significant factor in securing the Labour victory.(270)



## 5. WALSALL

Labour's third gain in the region came at Walsall, where a Conservative majority over the Liberals was turned into a Labour victory of nearly 5,000. The contest proved to be a genuine three-cornered struggle, owing to the Liberal's recent electoral successes here. Indeed the party had a strong candidate in Thomas MacNamara, the former Cabinet Minister, who had contested the 1925 by-election. The local organisation remained strong, whilst MacNamara had been nursing the seat carefully over the previous four years. The Labour candidate, selected in 1928, was J.J.MacShane, a Catholic Scot, who had moved to Walsall in 1916. He was a local headmaster, a member of the ILP and Chairman of Walsall's Board of Guardians.(271)

The Conservative MP was 'Billy' Preston, a local businessman, who had made little impression at Whitehall. Preston defended his parliamentary record by claiming that he was "not a professional politician", but knew "what my native town wants and how I can help it". He had the support of at least one prominent local Liberal, S.M.Slate, a former Mayor, who called for an anti-Socialist alliance.(272) Preston based much of his campaign around the issue of Safeguarding, claiming that local trade was improving and in some factories "it is difficult to get men for the particular job to be done".(273)

Since his selection MacShane had worked hard to improve the local party's organisation, especially in the wards. Finances were improved and canvassing tripled.(274) By the start of 1929, for instance, the Walsall Party had an election fund of nearly £15.(275) Unlike Bilston and Stourbridge, however, there was no significant increase in party membership at this time.(276) MacShane also recognised the importance of the new women voters, of whom there were over 10,000 in the constituency.(277) An Election Committee had been set up as early as February 1929, with at least four of its members to be women. Various committees were also appointed to deal with different aspects of the forthcoming election.(278) In March an agent was appointed and a newsletter, Eye Witness, printed.(279)

MacShane proved to be a forceful speaker, who put much emphasis on the constituency's unemployment problems. He concentrated his campaign on winning over the Liberal vote, warning the electorate that "they could not get a government with the Liberals". In particular he looked to the miners for support, as they were badly affected by unemployment and had traditionally supported the Liberals. A.J.Cook, the miners' leader, spoke at a May Day rally, warning that there would be no mining industry if Baldwin were returned.(280) A number of prominent politicians, including

MacDonald and Mosley, spoke in support of MacShane, with the Labour leader scorning Lloyd George's unemployment proposals.(281)

The result was to be a victory for MacShane, who secured over 20,000 votes, with Preston and MacNamara both polling over 15,000. The Walsall Observer declared that the anti-Socialist vote was higher than the Labour vote, concluding that "the two old parties should get together and not fight one another".(282) MacShane put his victory down to disgust with the existing Government, which "has helped its friends at the expense of the poor".(283) Another factor was the personality of the Labour candidate, who was held in some awe by the local party.(284) The improvements, which he had made to its organisation and finances, were also significant. Dean summarised him as "party agent, organiser and leader as well as candidate".(285)

## 6. SMETHWICK

Elsewhere in the Black Country, Labour was defending seats already held. In Smethwick Mosley predicted a majority of over 10,000, but had to settle for just over 7,000. After the excitement and rowdiness of the by-election, the local press described this contest as a "model campaign", fought in a "splendid spirit".(286)

The Conservative candidate, A.R.Wise, proved to be a tough opponent, who based much of his campaign on safeguarding and Empire development.(287) "The only way to increase prosperity all round was in the home market", he said, "which the Conservatives proposed to defend against goods produced under unfair competition abroad".(288) He was not afraid to stress the 'successes' of the Baldwin government on house building, pensions and Safeguarding, which he claimed had brought 600,000 jobs.(289)

Mosley attacked further Safeguarding as future tax increases, whilst he dismissed Lloyd George's plans as "an improvisation at the last moment", which would bring no long-term jobs. The Labour Party, he claimed, had "a comprehensive plan, a scientific plan, which did not just look ahead, but a long way ahead and would rebuild industry from the foundations upwards".(290) In an article in the Town Crier Mosley highlighted three issues. The first was unemployment and wages. Labour would reduce the former to a norm of ½ million by means of earlier pensions, raising the school leaving age and a constructive programme of slum clearance, electric power, roads and land reclamation. Less unemployment would bring higher wages and greater purchasing power, which were "the basis upon



which permanent industrial prosperity must rest". His second issue was housing as there were 200,000 unemployed in the building trades. Houses would be built at rents, which could be afforded by all. Finally Mosley focused on world peace, by arbitration and disarmament through the League of Nations.(291)

This time the Smethwick constituency had a Liberal candidate, Miss Marshall, who had an exemplary record of public service for East End charitable societies. She proved to be a well-qualified platform speaker, although noticeably staying silent on the question of Free Trade. It was wryly suggested that this was due to the state of local iron and steel works, which were reported as "languishing for want of safeguarding".(292) The Liberal organisation, however, had been allowed to lapse in the constituency and had only been revived three years earlier.(293)

According to the local press the result was "a foregone conclusion", but Labour did not poll as well as some of its supporters expected.(294) There was a 2.5 per cent swing to Labour on the 1924 result, but in the 1926 by-election Labour had secured 57.1 per cent of the vote, compared to 54.8 per cent this time. Indeed Mosley's share of the vote was almost exactly the same as Davison's had been at the 1923 General Election. This was largely due to the fact that the Conservative vote held up well, indicating that their Safeguarding policy had some support, although the Liberals also increased their share. The result shows,, however, that there was no overwhelming support for Mosley in the constituency.

## 7. WEST BROMWICH

In the Labour seat of West Bromwich the Conservatives also made Safeguarding their main issue. The Times pointed to the spring and tin plate trades in the constituency, which were part of the motor component industry, being safeguarded, but not iron and steel.(295) The Conservative candidate, Captain Cheshire, who was a local employer and the son of an alderman, warned that the motor spring industry would be "swept away by Labour" if Safeguarding went. This time the Liberals had a candidate, W.Ramage, an ex-cotton manufacturer, who was described as "a Free Trade stalwart of the old type".(296)

The Labour Party had a huge advantage in the personality of their MP, Frank Roberts. When he spoke at a meeting in the Town Hall, the Birmingham Gazette admitted that there was scarcely an interruption.(297) There was an audience of 3,000 at one West Bromwich meeting addressed by Roberts and Mosley.(298) The MP was popular with all generations, so that on polling day it was

reported that “crowds of youngsters followed him around the borough”.(299) Cheshire, on the other hand, experienced considerable abuse during the campaign and was even spat upon when leaving a meeting at Spon Lane.(300)

Roberts stressed the full Labour programme of nationalisation, public ownership of land and the extension of pensions for widows and ex-servicemen. The Birmingham Post complained that there was no mention of the cost of this.(301) Roberts gave credit for his victory to “the straight stand”, which he took on Labour’s policies and “the personal regard and good will” of the public.(302) However, Roberts share of the vote was little changed from 1924, but the Conservative vote dropped from 48.4% to 29 per cent. This was largely due to the 19 per cent share of the vote, which the Liberals secured.

## 8. WEDNESBURY

Much of the Wednesbury constituency was still affected by the recession of the early 1920s. The Times claimed that the local steel tube manufacturers were being driven by competition to import cheap raw materials from abroad.(303) In this constituency, too, the Conservative campaign was to stress the advantages of Safeguarding and its possible extension to other industries. The benefits of the Government’s De-rating Act were also praised, since it was claimed to have saved Wednesbury £90,000 a year.(304) Yet neither of these policies seemed to benefit the constituency’s Conservatives.

As in West Bromwich there was a certain degree of bitterness in the campaign, with the Conservatives in particular being affected by rowdiness at their meetings. The Conservative candidate, Rubin, suffered a particularly serious indignity. Unable to get a hearing at one meeting, he marched with his followers to the Market Place, where a Labour meeting was being held. He called for free speech for both sides. In the pandemonium, which followed, Rubin was hit on the head with a brick, rushed to hospital and took no further active part in the campaign. Later in a statement to the press Rubin complained of “the outrageous tactics” of his opponents, who organised raids by “howling irresponsibles” at Conservative meetings.(305)

The Wednesbury Labour Party remained a union dominated organisation with only the minimum number of individual members.(306) Nevertheless Short, the MP, aroused much enthusiasm and support as even the local press admitted.(307) He also experienced disruption at his meetings, although he seemed able to control it.(308) On one occasion after a bout of rowdyism he led a counter demonstration to the Conservative headquarters.(309)



Wednesbury also had a Liberal candidate, John Stockdale, who actively voiced his Free Trade credentials and emphasised Lloyd George's programme of public works, although this was dismissed by Conservatives as "skilled men doing road building".(310) However, the Liberal organisation in this constituency was notoriously weak and the party failed even to save its deposit. Short won comfortably with a majority of 5,331 and just over 50 per cent of the vote.

## 9. KINGSWINFORD

Labour's best result in 1929, however, came in Kingswinford, where Charlie Sitch's 10,338 majority was the largest in the region during the inter-war period. In securing 53.2 per cent of the vote, he was second only to Mosley's 54.8 per cent in Smethwick. Yet this had seemed unlikely twelve months earlier, when Sitch was defeated by a Liberal for the Quarry Bank and Amblecote seat on Staffordshire County Council.(311)

The Liberal parliamentary candidate, A.W.Bowkett, accused Sitch of a lack of involvement in the Commons. He flourished a folder, in which he claimed was a record of all the speeches made by Sitch during the previous parliament. When he opened the folder, it was empty.(312) The Conservatives in their turn stressed the success that Safeguarding had brought the local hollowware industry comparing it favourably with the iron and steel industry.(313)

Sitch obviously felt it necessary to trim some of Labour's policies. He admitted that there might be a case for Safeguarding certain industries, although in the last resort this meant "higher prices to the consumer". He went on to state that unemployment could only be reduced, if the International Labour Office secured "uniformity of hours of labour and conditions of work". The Birmingham Post described this statement as "a courageous admission".(314) Sitch was also forced to deny opposition claims that Labour wanted to raise the school leaving age to 15. He claimed that if Labour had to raise the age due to employment difficulties, "parents should be compensated for the loss of wages".(315)

Sitch's comfortable victory owed much to the Liberal intervention as Sitch only increased his percentage of the vote from 51.5 per cent to 53.2 per cent. The Liberals secured 18.1 per cent, which was their best result for the inter-war period. Sitch claimed that his success was because the electors preferred "a local man who understands their needs".(316) Certainly there is some evidence of growing local support for Labour as the number of individual members rose to 378 in 1929, which was the first time it recorded a figure above the minimum.(317)

## 10 STOURBRIDGE

The final Labour success was at Stourbridge, which was to be another three-cornered contest. Indeed the Birmingham Gazette referred to the constituency as “a Liberal stronghold” and considered the Liberal candidate, D.Finnemore, as the favourite. He was a well known Midland barrister, who was described as “one of the ablest political speakers any political platform in the country can boast”.(318) The Birmingham Post, however, reckoned that a Liberal revival would be at the expense of Labour. They were confident that the Conservative Safeguarding policy, which was benefiting the hollowware and glass industries, would reap benefits in the constituency.(319)

The Labour Party in Stourbridge was expanding its membership during these years under the inspiration of its popular MP, Wilfred Wellock. The Birmingham Post described him as an “out and out revolutionary Socialist”.(320) Nevertheless Wellock increased his by-election majority to nearly 4,000, although his share of the vote declined from 41.9 per cent to 38.4 per cent. It was the Liberals, who experienced the biggest increase in their vote amongst the enlarged franchise. They also raised their share of the vote from 24.1 per cent to 29.8 per cent, suggesting that they were attracting the new ‘flapper’ vote.

## G. CONCLUSIONS

The 1929 General Election was the peak performance for the Labour Party in the Black Country during the inter-war years. They secured 45.8 per cent of the vote compared with 33.5 per cent to the Conservatives and 20.5 per cent to the Liberals. This compares with Labour’s national share of 37.1 per cent and the Birmingham figure of 41.8 per cent.(321) Labour support in the Black Country showed much similarity to that in the West Yorkshire region surveyed by Reynolds and Laybourn. The main difference was that in West Yorkshire the Conservative support was lower at 27.6 per cent and the Liberals higher at 26.4 per cent.(322) A number of factors have to be considered in assessing Labour’s success.

Overall it seems that the General Strike proved to be the decisive turning point in the fortunes of Labour. Yet defeat for the trade unions meant that local parties could rely even less on them for membership and funds. On the other hand the Government’s policy was seen as an attack on the working class itself. It might seem that trade unionists were encouraged to turn to politics to reverse the impact of their defeat and the attack on the political levy. At the same time non-trade unionists, who in



the past might have been suspicious of Labour's close links with the unions, might now have been encouraged to support the party since some union powers had been clipped. The fact that the Labour Party nationally had been widening its appeal to attract support beyond the trade unions would have helped.

. This situation is reflected locally in constituencies where the Labour Party made efforts to improve its organisation and finances. This was most evident in Stourbridge and Bilston, where with an increase in party membership Labour appeared dynamic and performed well. This reflects the position described by Savage in his account of the Labour Party in Preston. In Walsall, too, improved organisation was a significant factor, although here there was no large increase in party membership. Indeed low individual party membership continued to remain a feature of the West Bromwich and Wednesbury parties, which suggests that they were still relying widely on trade unions for funds and organisation. Preserving this arrangement might suit some local parties, as it left control in the hands of a small clique of union members. The evidence from Wolverhampton, in particular, highlights the potential for clashes between the trade unionists and radical individual members.

The Conservative's decision to campaign around the issue of Safeguarding as a means of protecting and securing jobs seems to have failed in this Election. It may, however, have prevented bigger defeats in seats such as Smethwick. Overall there appears to be no correlation between levels of unemployment and Labour support. Thus the swing to Labour in Wednesbury with its high unemployment rate was much less than in neighbouring West Bromwich where employment was growing.

Personality was another major factor, especially in the case of Dudley, where party membership and funds remained minimal. Oliver Baldwin proved the ideal personality with an outstanding war record, coupled with his zeal to improve conditions for the working class. Indeed where the swings to Labour were biggest, as in Smethwick, West Bromwich, Kingswinford and Walsall, the personality of the candidate was a major factor.

Nevertheless despite Labour's strong polling in this Election only five of their nine victories were secured with a majority of the votes cast. This tended to reflect the national situation, making Labour's success seem rather fragile. Nevertheless this was more a reflection of the three party politics of the period. Labour's MPs were not that vulnerable, since the closest the Conservatives came was in Stourbridge, where they were still 6.6 per cent behind. Indeed in six of the region's seats the Conservatives needed swings of over 10 per cent to catch Labour, whilst in three the swing needed was

over 29 per cent. It seemed that in 1929 after a decade of growth Labour was firmly established across the Black Country.

## FOOTNOTES

1 The figures for the gains were:-

1924 – 20  
1925 – 47  
1926 – 146  
1927 – 95  
1928 – 111

Cook, C. 'Liberals, Labour and Local Elections' (1975), p.169.

2 Cook, C. (1980), p.89.

3 The mood of the Party after the 1924 General Election was "less generous than those of most defeated parties. Labour had gained seats in three successive general elections, and it had come dangerously near to assuming that the process would continue almost automatically". Snowden wrote to Shinwell of "the most incompetent leadership that ever brought a government to disaster" Marquand, D. (1977), pp.390-392..At the 1925 Party Conference there was a move, led by Bevin, to prevent Labour taking office again without a majority, but this was defeated. There was also an attempt to replace MacDonald with Henderson, but the latter stayed loyal to MacDonald. Thorpe, A. (1997), p.61.

4 Marquand, D. (1977), pp.424-7.

5 Pugh, M. (2002), pp.521-2.

6 At the 1920 Party Conference Herbert Morrison warned constituencies about choosing candidates "with big personal wealth or able to command money from some organisation". Reynolds, J. and Laybourn, K. (1987), pp.51-2.

7 Attempts to increase individual membership included a scheme like the one in 1925 to allow individual members to pay membership through instalments. Riddell, N. (1999), p.16.

8 Savage, M. (1987), pp.177-80.

9 Labour Party Annual Report 1929, p.8.

10 Reynolds, J. and Laybourn, K. (1987), pp.50-1.

11 Laybourn, K. (1988), p.62. The trade unions sponsored 135 candidates in the 1929 General Election, of whom 115 were successful. Labour Party Annual Report 1929, p.8.



- 12 Riddell makes the point that most men sympathetic to Labour would be affiliated through their trade union. This was why there was a big emphasis on enrolling women members. Riddell, N. (1999), p.16.
- 13 Thorpe claims that MacDonald had become “the prevailing voice of the Labour Party by 1927”. His view of socialism “had always been a consensual one, aiming to break down barriers, not to set them up; and part of this was convincing people that Labour, while envisaging, ultimately, a society that would be very different from the present one, would not make sudden radical changes”. Thorpe, A. (1997), p.66.
- 14 The motion in 1924 that no member of the Communist Party was eligible to become a member of the Labour Party was passed by 1,804,000 to 1,540,000 votes. The motion to refer this back was defeated in 1925 by 2,870,000 to 321,000. From a report on relations with the Communist Party. The Labour Party Annual Report 1926, p.317.
- 15 Hastings, R.P. ‘Birmingham Labour Movement 1918-1945’ in Midland History (1979-80), p.85.
- 16 Having supported the National Union of Women’s Suffrage Societies (NUWSS) before the war, Labour started the period with ‘women’s issues’ to the fore. In 1918 the Labour Party Constitution provided for separate women’s representation on the NEC, the formation of Women’s Sections in the constituency parties and an annual women’s conference. Graves, P.M. Labour Women: Women in Working Class Politics, 1918-1939 (1994), pp.5-29. Thorpe, A. (1997), pp.63-4.
- 17 Graves, P.M. (1994), pp.30-3.
- 18 Thorpe, A. (1997), p.64.
- 19 Savage points to the key role that women played in the local party in Preston in the late 1920s. He claims that they played an important part in reducing the hold of the unions and in directing the party towards a concentration on social issues and neighbourhood politics. Savage, M. (1987), pp.174-8.
- 20 According to Thorpe the economic situation ruled out radical policies, such as the capital levy. They came round to the view that prosperity would only return when international economic problems were solved. Thorpe, A. (1997), pp.63-4.
- 21 Thorpe goes on to claim that had ‘Labour and the Nation’ been written after the party’s by-election successes of 1928, then Labour might have adopted a clearer programme in anticipation of victory”. Ibid., pp.64-6.

- 22 Skidelsky, R. Politicians and the Slump (1967), pp.76-7.
- 23 Rolfe, K.W.D. (1974), p.211.
- 24 Savage, M. (1987), pp.177-80.
- 25 Pugh, M. (1993), p.250. For details on the measures taken by the Conservatives to involve women in the party during this period see Pugh, M. The Tories and the People (1985), p.180.
- 26 Williamson, P. (1999), p.37 "The principle threat to the Conservative ability to defeat the Labour Party was a Liberal recovery.... Baldwin decided the best response both to this and the Labour challenge was to understate his government's new proposals and instead emphasise its substantial past record, in order to contrast responsible and sound Conservative 'performance' with irresponsible and specious radical 'promises'".
- 27 The Times, 16 May 1929. The Conservative line on Protection in 1924 is well summed up by Williamson, P. (1999), p.173. "The agreed shadow cabinet formula of February 1924, that general tariffs would be proposed again only 'upon clear evidence that ... public opinion was disposed to reconsider its judgement', exactly expressed his own attitude, and he required a great deal of persuasion before moving again".
- 28 Birmingham Mail, 22 May 1929.
- 29 Mowat, C.L. (1955), pp.351-2.
- 30 Taylor, A.J.P. (1965), p.270.
- 31 Ramsden, J. (1978), pp.211-2. Also Williamson, P. 'Safety First: Baldwin, the Conservative Party and the 1929 General Election'. Historical Journal 25, 2, (1982), pp.385-409.
- 32 Cook, C. (1980), pp.89-90.
- 33 Cook, C. (1980), p.89. Of the 569 Labour candidates 364 were backed by their constituencies, 139 by trade unions, 54 by the ILP and 12 by the Co-operative movement. Labour Party Annual Report 1929, p.8.
- 34 Riddell, N. (1999), pp.9-10.
- 35 Savage, M. (1994), pp.85-6. The large cities, which Savage refers to for this study are:- London, the London boroughs, Glasgow, Manchester/Salford, Birmingham, Liverpool, Sheffield, Leeds, Bristol, Edinburgh, Bradford, Hull, Newcastle, Nottingham and the Potteries.
- 36 The figures for the main regions of Britain were:- Scotland 37 (up 11), the North East 22 (up 6), Lancashire and Cheshire 44 (up 26), Yorkshire 40 (up 16), the East Midlands 22 (up 12), the West



- Midlands 25 (up 14), London 36 (up 17) and Greater London 18 (up 11). Cole, G.D.H. (1948), pp.222-3.
- 37 Birmingham Gazette, 3 November 1924.
- 38 Ibid., 3 November 1925. Town Crier, 6 November 1925
- 39 Boughton, J. (1998), pp.16-20.
- 40 Birmingham Borough Labour Party Minutes, 26 July 1926 and 30 August 1926. An amendment to a resolution was passed, deploring the action of members in going to the press over the matter, but a motion to take disciplinary action against Joseph Southall was defeated.
- 41 Ibid., 28 November 1927.
- 42 Ibid., 8 December 1927.
- 43 The Edgbaston Constituency Party refused to expel Southall, whilst Moseley voted in expelled members. Ibid., 27 February 1928 and 5 March 1928.
- 44 The Labour Party Annual Report 1928, p.19.
- 45 According to Pugh "the strike certainly provoked a working class backlash against the Conservatives in Birmingham". Pugh, M. (2002), p.531.
- 46 The printing, transport and rail unions totalled 18,000. Elsewhere the Birmingham Wagon Co. and the Metro Wagon Works were closed. Vehicle builders brought chaos to the car works of Wolsley and Longbridge. Lucas, B.S.A., Averys, Lanchester Motors and New Hudson continued in some form. Cadburys was less affected, Dunlop was given police protection, whilst GEC had 2 out of 3 workers in. At both the B.S.A. and Kynocks a military guard was brought in. The part played by Birmingham in the General Strike is covered by Hastings, R.P. 'The General Strike in Birmingham' in Skelley, J (Ed) The General Strike 1926 (1976), pp.208-26.
- 47 Morris, M. The General Strike (1976), p.41. Four classes were drawn up to categorise the response to the strike:- 1. Where the strike was 100%. 2. Wholly effective with weaknesses in some areas. 3. Towns with serious weaknesses. 4. Where the strike broke down. The statistics were collected by the Plebs League and published in Postgate, R.W., Wilkinson, E. and Horrabin, J.F. (eds.) A Worker's History of the General Strike (1927).
- 48 Town Crier, 18 June 1926. Quoted in Boughton, J. (1998), p.19.
- 49 The strike in Birmingham was described as having peaked before the end with transport workers representatives voting for a return on the 9 May. When the second wave was called out on 12 May

the response was less dramatic. However there was bitterness over the conditions many workers had to accept on their return. The members of the Trade Union Emergency Committee who had been arrested on the 10 May for spreading erroneous statements about the Government were fined £10. They found it difficult to get their own jobs back. Hastings, R.P. (1976), pp.220-2.

50 Ibid., pp.225-6. Town Crier, 3 September 1926.

51 The Labour Party Annual Report 1927, p.152. The full figures with the number of members paying 2d each were:-

Aston	£1/10	180
Deritend	£3	360
Duddeston	£1/10	180
Edgbaston	£2/10	300
Erdington	£1/10	180
Handsworth	£2/5/10	275
Kings Norton	£2/7/6	285
Ladywood	£2/5	270
Mosley	£1/10	180
Sparkbrook	£3/18/2	469
West Birmingham	£1/10	180
Yardley	£5	600

52 The Labour Party Annual Report 1930, pp.135-6. The full figures with the number of members paying 2d each were:-

Aston	£3/6	396
Deritend	£1/10	180
Duddeston	£1/10	168
Edgbaston	£1/10	180
Erdington	£1/10	180
Handsworth	£2/15/4	322
Kings Norton	£5/5	630
Ladywood	£2/18/4	350
Mosley	£1/10	180
Sparkbrook	£2/7/2	283
West Birmingham	£3/10	420
Yardley	£5	600

53 Birmingham Gazette, 2 November 1926. According to figures given in the Birmingham Post, the seats on the new council, with the old in brackets, were Conservatives 73 (78), Labour 29 (21), Liberals 7 (7), Independents 11 (14), although these figures include aldermen. Birmingham Post, 2 November 1926.

54 Birmingham Gazette, 2 November 1927. The figures given for the new council, including aldermen, were Conservatives 71, Labour 33, Liberals 7, Independents 9. Birmingham Post, 2 November 1927.



- 55 Birmingham Gazette, 2 November 1928. The figures for the new council, without the aldermen in brackets, were Conservatives 71 (50), Labour 36 (31), Liberals 5 (2), Independents 9 (8).  
Birmingham Post, 2 November 1928.
- 56 Labour secured 41.8 per cent of the vote, the Conservatives 48.2 per cent and the Liberals 10 per cent. See Appendices Tables C and D.
- 57 Neville Chamberlain wrote of “the ceaseless propaganda that has been going on for years among the working classes that things would never be right for them till a ‘Labour’ Government came in. Every grievance has been exploited to point this moral – people who have not got pensions, people who have had their assessments raised, people who could not get a municipal house, people whose wages were low or who were unemployed, or were excluded from benefit, etc. etc.” Neville Chamberlain Papers (1929). Quoted in Boughton, J. (1998), p.20.
- 58 Austen Chamberlain wrote that “the old people still supported us but the young were sullen and resentful and voted socialist almost solidly”. Austen Chamberlain Papers (1929). Quoted in Boughton, J. (1998), p.20.
- 59 Cadbury, the chocolate manufacturer, left the Liberal Party during the First World War. One quarter of the city’s Labour councillors lived on Cadbury’s Bournville estate. Boughton, J. (1998), p.17.
- 60 Pugh makes the point that Labour’s upper-class recruits in the West Midlands came from a Conservative rather than a Liberal background. Pugh, M. (2002), pp.530-1.
- 61 Schurmer, a member of the Salvation Army, was a Labour councillor in the 1920s and an MP in 1945. Boughton, J. (1998), p.18.
- 62 The Times, 23 May 1929.
- 63 Birmingham Post, 25 May 1929.
- 64 The Times, 14 May 1929. The article stressed that the industries that were flourishing were motor cars, motor accessories and buttons, which were all safeguarded.
- 65 Town Crier, 17 May 1929.
- 66 Birmingham Gazette, 1 June 1929.
- 67 Town Crier, 31 May 1929.
- 68 Birmingham Post, 1 June 1929.
- 69 See Appendices Table E..

- 70 See Appendices Table E..
- 71 Barnsby, G. (1998), p.493.
- 72 In Old Hill, for instance, only 587 of the 2,000 miners were in a union in 1926. Horsnell, C.J. (1991). p.44.
- 73 The part played by the Black Country in the General Strike is covered by Barnsby, G. General Strike in the Black Country in Skelley, J. (1976), pp.193-207 Also in Barnsby, G. (1998) pp.491-502.
- 74 Morris, M. (1975) p.41.
- 75 Barnsby writes of victimisation on the railways and companies such as Guys and the Midland Red, getting their men to sign a document before returning to work. Barnsby, G.(1975), p.206.
- 76 Salmon's motion was lost by one vote. Town Crier, 11 June 1926.
- 77 West Bromwich Trades Council was responsible for miners in the east of South Staffordshire and Worcestershire, raising £3,500 by February 1927. Brierley Hill Trades Council was responsible for the west. Walsall Trades Council collected for the Pelsall miners. Barnsby, G. (1998), p.500.
- 78 Black Country miners were forced back on to an 8-hour day. Their wages were fixed to the 1911 basis + 57 per cent in March, 47 per cent by the end of June to a minimum of 40 per cent. Their estimated average pay was 7/- a shift. Ibid., pp.501-2.
- 79 Town Crier, 12 November 1929.
- 80 See Appendices Table E.
- 81 The anti-Socialists won the other 27 council seats. See Appendices Table E..
- 82 Wolverhampton Express and Star, 23 March 1927.
- 83 Wolverhampton Labour Party Minutes, Ward Committee Meeting 28 April 1927.
- 84 Ibid.
- 85 Ibid.
- 86 See Appendices Table E.
- 87 Cook, C. (1975) pp.69-70.
- 88 See Appendices Table E.
- 89 Gardner,K.D. (1994), pp.51-54 and p.61.
- 90 Riddell, N. (1999), p.16.
- 91 The Labour Party Annual Report 1927, p.150. See Appendices Table F.



- 92 The Labour Party Annual Report 1928, pp.132-6, Annual Report 1929, pp.132-6 and Annual Report 1930, pp.132-6. See Appendices Table G.
- 93 Reynolds, J. and Laybourn, K. (1987), p.51. Trade unionists dominated local constituency parties in the West Riding during the 1920s. A third of Labour councillors in Bradford at this time were trade union officials.
- 94 Bilston Labour Party Women's Section Minute Book, 17 March 1926, 14 April 1926, 2 March 1927, 26 May 1926.
- 95 In 1926 £2-10s was given to the funds of the New Town by-election, which Labour won by 514 votes. Ibid., 9 August 1926. A woman candidate was selected for New Town Ward. Ibid., 16 November 1927.
- 96 Labour gained the Ettingshall and High Town seats in the April elections. Birmingham Post, 3 April 1928.
- 97 Wolverhampton Labour Party Minutes, Executive Committee Meeting, 19 November 1926.
- 98 Ibid., Executive Committee Meeting, 17 December 1926.
- 99 Ibid., Executive Committee Meeting, 3 March 1927.
- 100 Ibid., Joint Meeting of the East and West Wolverhampton Executive Committees and the Bushbury Executive Committee, 21 May 1928.
- 101 Ibid., Executive Committee Meeting, 24 May 1928.
- 102 Town Crier, 24 December 1925.
- 103 Ibid., 19 October 1928.
- 104 Ibid., 2 November 1928.
- 105 Wolverhampton Labour Party Minutes, Executive Committee Meeting, 3 April 1929.
- 106 Pugh, M. (1982), p.256.
- 107 Savage, M. and Miles, A. (1994), p.81.
- 108 Mosley was also giving £450 to the Ladywood division in Birmingham. Riddell, N. (1999), p.48.
- 109 Birmingham Gazette, 25 February 1925.
- 110 Walsall Observer, 7 February 1925.
- 111 Wolverhampton Express and Star, 9 February 1925.
- 112 Birmingham Post, 18 February 1925.
- 113 The Times, 26 February 1925.

- 114 Birmingham Post, 25 February 1925, Walsall Observer, 21 February 1925.
- 115 Mrs Preston's appeal to the electorate. Birmingham Post, 24 February 1925.
- 116 Birmingham Gazette, 19 February 1925.
- 117 Birmingham Post, 26 February 1925.
- 118 Birmingham Gazette, 20 February 1925.
- 119 Birmingham Post, 23 February 1925.
- 120 The Times, 26 February 1925.
- 121 Birmingham Post, 25 February 1925.
- 122 Ibid., 20 February 1925.
- 123 Ibid., 25 February 1925.
- 124 Ibid., 20 February 1925.
- 125 Ibid., 25 February 1925.
- 126 Ibid., 24 February 1925.
- 127 Birmingham Gazette, 25 February 1925.
- 128 Town Crier, 6 March 1925.
- 129 The Times, 27 February 1925.
- 130 Town Crier, 6 March 1925.
- 131 Birmingham Post, 28 February 1925.
- 132 Both Davison and Mosley were members of the ILP.
- 133 Town Crier, 3 December 1924.
- 134 Mosley had served in the 16<sup>th</sup> Lancers and the Royal Flying Corps during the Great War. The main proponent of the view that this effected his future beliefs has been his biographer, Robert Skidelsky. Skidelsky, R. Oswald Mosley (1975), p.155.
- 135 Skidelsky claims that the reasons for Mosley's dislike of the General Strike were:- 1. Because it was revolutionary. 2. Because it was unconstitutional. 3. Because it was a plebeian solution. Ibid., p.156.
- 136 Mosley had good relations with the Clydeside leaders, Maxton and Wheatley, but never got on with Morrison and Dalton. Ibid., p.126.
- 137 Birmingham Gazette, 27 November 1926, N.E.C. Minutes, 24 November 1926.
- 138 Town Crier, 26 November 1926.



- 139 Birmingham Gazette, 27 November 1926.
- 140 Birmingham Post, 2 December 1926.
- 141 Birmingham Gazette, 27 November 1926.
- 142 Town Crier, 3 December 1926.
- 143 Skidelsky, R. (1975), pp.158-9.
- 144 N.E.C. Minutes, 1 December 1926.
- 145 Town Crier, 3 December 1926.
- 146 Skidelsky, R. (1975), p.158.
- 147 N.E.C. Minutes, 27 November 1926.
- 148 Ibid., 1 December 1926.
- 149 The four N.E.C. representatives were Frank Roberts, Egerton Wake, T.C.Cramp and Jack Hayes.  
Smethwick Telephone, 11 December 1926.
- 150 Town Crier, 10 December 1926.
- 151 Skidelsky, R. (1975), p.161 quoting from The Times, 1 January 1927.
- 152 Quoted in the Town Crier, 17 December 1926.
- 153 Ibid.
- 154 Birmingham Gazette, 21 December 1926.
- 155 Ibid., 9 December 1926.
- 156 This was before the miners' strike and the General Strike.
- 157 Birmingham Post, 4 December 1926.
- 158 Birmingham Gazette, 9 December 1926.
- 159 Birmingham Post, 8 December 1926.
- 160 The Times, 8 December 1926. Pike informed the paper that he had "the support of the leaders of the old Handsworth Division Liberal Association".
- 161 The terms offered to the West Midland miners were a cut from 9s 2d to 8s 3d a shift for the thick coal pikemen and 7s 4d to 6s 7d for loaders. Birmingham Post, 11 December 1926.
- 162 Ibid., 9 December 1926.
- 163 Ibid., 10 December 1926.
- 164 The Times, 10 December 1926.
- 165 Ibid., 14 December 1926.

166 Birmingham Post, editorial 10 December 1926.

167 The Times, 13 December 1926.

168 Birmingham Post, 9 December 1926.

169 Birmingham Gazette, 15 December 1926.

170 Ibid., 8 December 1926.

171 The Times, 11 December 1926.

172 In Mosley's speech at the Smethwick Empire on 11 December 1926 he scorned Charles Hyde of the Birmingham Post and the Birmingham Mail, who turned down the chance to take Chamberlain's seat at Ladywood, for not having the courage to come out in front of the electors. Lords Beaverbrook and Rothermere were described as "two of the most notorious enemies of the working class". Birmingham Post, 13 December 1926.

173 Birmingham Gazette, 16 December 1926.

174 Ibid., 17 December 1926.

175 Ibid., 21 December 1926.

176 Town Crier, 17 December 1926.

177 Birmingham Gazette, 17 December 1926.

178 The Times, 18 December 1926.

179 Ibid., 20 December 1926.

180 For the result in full see Appendices Table A.

181 Mosley's words in full were:- "The result of this election sends a message to every worker in the land. You have met and defeated the Press of reaction.... Tonight all Britain looks to you and thanks you. My wonderful friends of Smethwick by your heroic battle against a whole world in arms, I believe you have introduced a new era for British democracy". Skidelsky, R. (1975), p.162

182 Daily Mail, 26 December 1926.

183 The Times, 20 December 1926.

184 Birmingham Gazette, 23 December 1926.

185 Birmingham Post, 23 December 1926.

186 Ibid., 22 December 1926.

187 Town Crier, 24 December 1926.



188 N.E.C. Committee Meeting, 22 December 1926. The members of the sub committee were Roberts, Lansbury, MacDonald, Dennison, Dalton and Henderson.

189 Birmingham Post, 6 December 1926. See also J.D.Brewer, Mosley's Men 'The British Union of Fascists in the West Midlands' (1984), p.50.

190 Smethwick Telephone, 18 December 1926. Brewer, J.D. (1984), p.50.

191 The Times, 22 February 1927.

192 Ibid., 11 February 1927. Hodgkin was said to be "the unanimous and unprompted choice of the local organisation". He was described as "a businessman, a capable politician and a bright, entertaining speaker".

193 Birmingham Post, 15 February 1927.

194 Ibid., 18 February 1927.

195 Ibid., 16 February 1927.

196 The Times, 19 February 1927.

197 Ibid., 22 February 1927. Birmingham Gazette, 25 February 1927.

198 Town Crier, 25 February 1927.

199 Birmingham Post, 18 February 1927.

200 Ibid., 22 February 1927.

201 The Times, 23 February 1927.

202 Birmingham Post, 19 February 1927.

203 Ibid., 23 February 1927.

204 For the result in full see Appendices Table A.

205 Birmingham Post, 25 February 1927.

206 Individual Labour Party membership in Stourbridge rose from 180 in 1923 to 240 in 1924, 300 in 1925 and 500 in 1926 and 1927. See Appendices Table F.

207 Wolverhampton Express and Star, 24 February 1927.

208 Bennett, G.H. 'Part of the Puzzle. Northampton and other Midland By-Election Defeats for the Conservatives, 1927-29' in Midland History (1995) XX, pp.151-73.

209 Ibid., pp.159-60.

210 The Times, 25 March 1927.

211 Bennett, G.H. (1995), p.159.

212 Birmingham Post, 28 May 1929.

213 The unemployment rate for Birmingham and the Black Country towns as given in Allen, G.C.  
(1929) p.384 :-

	<u>July 1927</u>	<u>December 1927</u>
Birmingham	6.8%	6.0%
Wolverhampton	7.9%	7.3%
Oldbury	7.9%	7.2%
Smethwick	8.4%	7.6%
Darlaston	8.6%	8.9%
Willenhall	9.4%	9.8%
Stourbridge	9.7%	9.5%
West Bromwich	12.2%	11.9%
Dudley	12.3%	13.6%
Tipton	12.5%	13.0%
Cradley	12.6%	13.1%
Walsall	13.1%	11.4%
Bilston	13.9%	12.5%
Brierley Hill	14.3%	12.3%
Wednesbury	16.1%	17.3%

214 Ibid., pp.403-4.

215 Ibid., p.385. The three deep mines were Baggeridge near Dudley, Sandwell Park and Hamstead  
near West Bromwich.

216 Iron ore came from Oxfordshire and Northamptonshire, whilst coking coal came from South  
Wales, Lancashire or Yorkshire. Ibid., p.384.

217 Ibid., p.387.

218 The three main steel works were at Bilston, Brierley Hill and Halesowen. Most of the imported  
semi manufactured steel came from Belgium or Holland. Ibid., p.388.

219 Ibid., pp.389-397.

220 See Footnote 167.

221 The Times, 16 May 1929.

222 Birmingham Post, 22 May 1929.

223 Ibid., 28 May 1929.

224 Ibid., 25 May 1929.

225 Ibid., 21 May 1929.

226 Ibid., 23 May 1929.

227 Ibid., 22 May 1929.

228 Ibid., 24 May 1929.



229 The Times, 16 May 1929.

230 Birmingham Post, 22 May 1929.

231 Ibid.

232 The Times, 18 May 1929.

233 Gardner, K.D. (1994), p.101. The Wolverhampton and District Branch of the Young Liberals rejected the pact at their Annual General Meeting on 24 January 1928.

234 Wolverhampton Express and Star, 14 May 1929.

235 Ibid.

236 Ibid., 17 May 1929.

237 Ibid., 14 May 1929.

238 Ibid., 22 May 1929.

239 Birmingham Gazette, 22 May 1929.

240 Wolverhampton Express and Star, 31 May 1929.

241 Bowers gave five other reasons:- Anomalies in the Pension Acts. Reduced grants for milk to expectant mothers. The extension of the women's franchise. Increased taxes and duties on petrol, betting and silk. The attraction of Labour's policies, such as on pensions. Gardner, K.D. (1994), p.104.

242 Mander had been the Liberal candidate in the Stourbridge by-election. The Times, 18 May 1929.

243 Ibid.

244 He now claimed that local people were making "a tin god" out of Lloyd George. Wolverhampton Express and Star, 16 May 1929.

245 Ibid., 15 May 1929.

246 The Times, 18 May 1929.

247 Birmingham Gazette, 27 May 1929.

248 Gardner, K.D. (1994), p.104.

249 Wolverhampton Express and Star, 31 May 1929.

250 Birmingham Post, 22 May 1929.

251 Gardner, K.D. (1994), p.106. Thompson had a military record, as well as being a director of a boiler making business. Birmingham Mail, 22 May 1929.

- 252 Birmingham Post, 22 May 1929. Thompson attacked the Liberal road building programme for making men navvies, when skilled work was needed. He also attacked Labour's links with Russia. Wolverhampton Express and Star, 24 May 1929. Gardner, K.D.(1994) p.106.
- 253 The Times, 18 May 1929.
- 254 In 1929 the Bilston Labour Party had 660 individual members, contributing £5/10. Labour Party Annual Report 1930, pp.133-134. See Appendices Table G.
- 255 Wolverhampton Express and Star, 16 May 1929.
- 256 Ibid., 31 May 1929.
- 257 There was no record of individual membership or fees for the Dudley Labour Party in 1926, 1927, 1928 and 1929. This suggests that there was less than the minimum of 180 members for a constituency. See Appendices Table G
- 258 Birmingham Mail, 27 May 1929.
- 259 The Times, 16 May 1929.
- 260 Wolverhampton Express and Star, 18 May 1929.
- 261 Ibid., 17 May 1929.
- 262 The Times, 16 May 1929.
- 263 Ibid.
- 264 Birmingham Post, 23 May 1929.
- 265 Shouts of 'What about Baggeridge?' and 'That's a lie' were reported at one Conservative meeting. Wolverhampton Express and Star, 23 May 1929.
- 266 Birmingham Gazette, 20 May 1929.
- 267 The Times, 16 May 1929.
- 268 Wolverhampton Express and Star, 31 May 1929.
- 269 Dudley Herald, 1 June 1929.
- 270 Wolverhampton Express and Star, 31 May 1929.
- 271 Dean, K.G. (1972), pp.110-11. MacShane came from Wishaw in Lanarkshire. He left school at 14 to work in a wagon works. Educated at night school, he graduated from Glasgow University. He came to Walsall in 1915, as a teacher, becoming headmaster of Bloxwich Roman Catholic School in 1922. Walsall Observer, 1 June 1929.
- 272 It was reported that Preston had made few speeches at Westminster. Dean, K.G. (1972), p.109.



273 Birmingham Post, 25 May 1929.

274 Walsall Labour Party Minutes, 18 December 1928

275 Ibid., 24 January 1929. The Treasurer reported a balance of £4/16/8 in hand, £1/19/6 in the bank and £14/18/9 in the General Election fund.

276 In 1927 there were 180 individual members, rising to 300 in 1928. In 1929, however, the figure was back at 180. See Appendices Table G.

277 Dean, K.G. (1972), p.108.

278 Walsall Labour Party Minutes, 21 February 1929. The Election Committee was to contain 16 members and officials. Committees were also set up to deal with finance, canvassing, transport, women's matters, the press and publicity.

279 Ibid., 24 March and 28 March 1929. The agent, Mr Prior, was to be part time at £2 a week and full time for two weeks before the election.

280 Dean, K.G. (1972), p.112.

281 Ibid., p.112-3. MacDonald described the Liberal Party as having "ceased to be politicians, they have become wizards". Mosley talked of the Liberals as a "has-been" party, "a ghost of long ago, a shadow, which he saw flitting through the House of Commons in his early days". Walsall Observer, 25 May 1929.

282 Ibid., 1 June 1929.

283 Wolverhampton Express and Star, 31 May 1929.

284 A member of the Executive Committee described him as "a saintly, God fearing man... with a great mission". Walsall Observer, 8 June 1929.

285 Dean, K.G. (1975), p.115.

286 Smethwick Telephone, 1 June 1929.

287 Birmingham Mail, 25 May 1929. Wise, who had been educated at Oxford, was an Assistant District Commissioner in Kenya from 1923-26 and a Captain in the Queen's Royal Regiment. Birmingham Post, 21 May 1929.

288 Smethwick Telephone, 25 May 1929.

289 The Conservatives, he claimed, had built 800,000 houses in 4 years, provided pensions for widows and orphans and given the old age pension at 65 rather than 70. Ibid., 21 May 1929. Wise also pointed out that there were 600,000 more people in work than in 1924. Unemployment was

accounted for by the loss of foreign trade and the fall in emigration. Birmingham Post, 21 May 1929.

290 Smethwick Telephone, 18 May 1929.

291 Town Crier, 24 May 1929.

292 Birmingham Post, 21 May 1929.

293 Smethwick Telephone, 1 June 1929.

294 Ibid.

295 The Times, 16 May 1929.

296 Birmingham Post, 21 May 1929. Cheshire's family business of 150 years was Messrs. Izon and Co., which was one of the oldest hollowware manufacturers in the district.

297 Birmingham Gazette, 25 May 1929.

298 Ibid., 27 May 1929.

299 Midland Chronicle, 31 May 1929.

300 Birmingham Gazette, 29 May 1929. "They were subjected to a running fire of abuse and interruption and as Captain Cheshire left the building some women spat in his face".

301 Birmingham Post, 21 May 1929.

302 Midland Chronicle, 31 May 1929.

303 The Times, 16 May 1929.

304 Birmingham Post, 27 May 1929. Baldwin's De-rating Act excluded farmland from rates and cut them on industrial premises. On the eve of poll the Birmingham Gazette wrote that "De-rating has had little platform appeal and the Conservatives have had to rely upon the sectional interest of Safeguarding and upon the personality of Mr Baldwin". Birmingham Gazette, 30 May 1929.

305 Tipton Herald, 25 May 1929.

306 See Appendices Tables F and G.

307 Wolverhampton Express and Star, 28 May 1929.

308 Short was shouted down at Darlaston on 15 May. Tipton Herald, 18 May 1929.

309 Wolverhampton Express and Star, 16 May 1929.

310 Birmingham Post, 27 May 1929.

311 Birmingham Gazette, 20 May 1929.

312 Ibid., 27 May 1929.



313 Birmingham Post, 22 May 1929. Birmingham Mail, 22 May 1929.

314 Birmingham Post, 22 May 1929.

315 Birmingham Gazette, 29 May 1929.

316 Wolverhampton Express and Star, 31 May 1929.

317 Labour Party Annual Report 1930, pp.133-7. The figure for previous years was 180 individual members, paying £1/10. See Appendices Tables F and G.

318 Birmingham Gazette, 29 May 1929.

319 According to the Birmingham Post within a month of the introduction of safeguarding in the hollowware industry in Lye “every factory was working at full shifts, all the stocks were cleared and most of the manufacturers are considering putting down new machinery and adding to wages”.  
Birmingham Post, 24 May 1929.

320 Ibid.

321 See Appendices Tables B and D.

322 Labour secured 46 per cent of the vote in West Yorkshire in 1929. Reynolds, J. and Laybourn, K. (1987), p.85.

## CHAPTER 5 - 1929-1931

### A. NATIONAL DEVELOPMENTS

Historians have noted that Labour's success in 1929 had not been as great as it seemed, since many of their victories were won by the slenderest of margins. With 41 per cent of their seats won on a minority vote, Labour was very dependent on a strong Liberal poll. Indeed a Liberal collapse would greatly benefit the Conservatives, who were the main challengers in Liberal seats.(1) Overall the Conservatives had won the largest share of the vote, although securing fewer seats than Labour. 56 of Labour's 287 seats were vulnerable to a 3 per cent swing to the Conservatives, whilst a 3 per cent swing to Labour would yield them only 21 extra seats.

Nevertheless there was a great deal of optimism amongst Labour supporters following their victory. Most anticipated that their party would continue its advance, gaining an absolute majority at the next Election.(2) The NEC sought to capitalise on this goodwill by doubling the individual affiliation fee to head office to 4d a member at the Party Conference. This was strongly resisted, however, by many local parties, who claimed that it would undermine their membership. Eventually a compromise figure of 3d per member was agreed upon.(3)

Historians have also pointed out that the government started well, especially in foreign affairs, where the Soviet Union was recognised and moves on disarmament begun. At home the Widows and Old Age Pensions Acts were extended, but there was soon trouble over the government's plans for the coal industry, education and repeal of the 1927 Trades Disputes Act.(4) Even worse the unemployment numbers remained static and then began to rise.

The state of the Conservative Party during 1929 seemed to confirm Labour's early hopes. A survey of constituencies was made by the Conservatives, in order to analyse the reasons for their defeat. Most felt that the party lacked a "definite and constructive policy" as a "positive alternative to Socialism". Since it was also thought that the policy of Safeguarding should have been promoted with "greater vigour", this can be seen as support for introducing a wider policy of Protection. At the same time there was little support for the party's social reforms when in government. The 'flapper' vote was blamed for their defeat, whilst reforms in local government and the de-rating policy did not arouse enthusiasm. Indeed it was felt that the failure to cut public spending lost them support at a time when there was a growing demand amongst the middle class for retrenchment. Finally lack of support in the national press was considered a serious handicap.(5) During 1929 Baldwin found leadership of his



Party difficult as the demands for Protection grew and Beaverbrook launched his Empire Free Trade campaign.

The first test of Labour's popularity came in the 1929 municipal elections, when the party made 100 net gains.(6) Yet unemployment remained high. Having dipped in June, the total rose steadily during the autumn to reach 1.5 million in January, which was 12.9 per cent of the insured workforce. During 1930, as the impact of the American Depression was felt, the position deteriorated dramatically, rising each month to reach 2 million in August and 2.5 million in December.(7)

Oswald Mosley had been appointed to the Cabinet in 1929 in order to help Jimmy Thomas, the Lord Privy Seal, deal with unemployment. He soon became impatient and then contemptuous of Thomas's proposals, which seemed ineffective. Snowden and the Treasury, however, blocked more radical solutions as they were determined to maintain a balanced budget. In December 1929 Mosley produced a Memorandum, which called for greater executive power, import controls to enable domestic development and for a short term reconstruction programme to be financed by a £200 million loan over three years. The proposals were eventually rejected by the Cabinet in May 1930. Mosley then resigned his post but failed by 210 to 29 to secure the support of the Parliamentary Labour Party.(8)

Mosley was not the only critic of the government from within the party. The ILP also blamed unemployment on underconsumption, but saw Mosley's policy as an alternative to Socialism. They put more emphasis on redistribution and nationalisation. At the ILP Party Conference in Birmingham in April 1930 18 of the 140 ILP Members of Parliament agreed to follow Maxton in a policy independent of the Labour Party. Amongst these was the Wolverhampton MP, W.J.Brown, who claimed that "the characteristic feature of Labour Party policies during the past ten years has been a steady drift to the right and increasing attacks on the left. There was now an effective Liberal-Labour alliance".(9)

At the Llandudno Labour Party Conference in October 1930 Mosley secured much support, but a motion to examine his proposals was lost by 200,000 votes. Nevertheless Mosley was elected on to the N.E.C. In general, however, the challenge to Snowden's insistence on Free Trade, the Gold Standard and a balanced budget was not strong enough. These policies, backed by MacDonald and Thomas, were influenced by the orthodox Treasury view on Government spending. There has been much criticism of this by writers such as Skidelsky in Politicians and the Slump and in his biography of Mosley. Skidelsky believed that the Labour Government should have followed a Keynesian programme of deficit financing and extensive public works.(10)



The difficulties of a Labour Government adopting Keynesian policies at this time have been examined by Ross McKibbin. He claims that it was unlikely that Mosley's views could have been imposed, given the economic strength of the financial establishment. Orthodox opinion prevailed amongst the three main parties, which only the Second World War broke down. Moreover when Keynesian policies were tried by the Australian Labour Government, they did not succeed. Furthermore with Britain dependent on food imports there was a danger that by expanding the domestic economy, the pound would lose its value and inflation prevail. The memories of Germany in the early 1920s remained strong. Finally McKibbin has argued that by following a policy of drift, coupled with Britain's fairly generous unemployment benefits, the Labour Government was actually avoiding the worst effects of the Depression.(11)

Historians of the demise of the Labour Government have been divided over whether defeat was due to the events immediately preceding the 1931 General Election or whether a malaise had set in well before due to the unemployment crisis. Mowat, for instance, although giving a devastating criticism of the failures of the Labour Government, endorses the view that defeat was due to the betrayal of MacDonald and his handful of National Labour MPs, coupled with a dishonourable election campaign by the supporters of the National Government. "The stridency of the campaign" he writes "was another unpleasant reminder of 1918 and of 1924". The National Government had no programme "except a belief in their own indispensability". The one thing that their candidates could unite around was "the abuse of Labour and appeals to voters fears of Labour if victorious".(12)

Reynolds and Laybourn, in their study of the West Yorkshire Labour Party, seem to agree with Mowat, in claiming that support for the Party appeared to hold up well until the General Election. A by-election was lost at Shipley in November 1930, but there were the special circumstances here of a ten week lockout in the textile industry, which was followed by a 5 per cent wage cut. The authors accept too that in the 1930 municipal elections in West Yorkshire, although the Party lost some seats, "Labour did not do badly".(13)

On the other hand Cook has noted that by-election results were beginning to go against Labour, with four seats lost to the Conservatives between May 1930 and June 1931, whilst others were held on reduced majorities.(14) Cook has also noted the check to Labour in the 1930 municipal elections, which certainly provided a sharp rebuff for the Party. Nationally they suffered a net loss of 65 seats, whilst the Conservatives had 69 net gains. Labour lost 6 seats in Salford, 7 in Liverpool, 5 in



Birmingham Labour also lost control of Leeds, Hull, Swansea, Barnsley and Blackburn. Cook has explained Labour's defeat as partly due to "a national swing back from 1927, partly a protest at the Government but perhaps as much as anything due to a renewal and extension of Conservative-Liberal municipal pacts".(15)

In his recent study of the 1929-31 Labour Government Neil Riddell has followed a similar theme, describing a deepening rift between MacDonald, Snowden and Thomas on the one hand and elements of the Labour Movement on the other. The trade unions, for instance, had become estranged by the Government's failure to solve the unemployment situation and by the inadequacies of the Government's legislative programme.(16) They were also resentful at not being represented on the Royal Commission on Unemployment Insurance, which proposed reduced benefits and increased contributions in an interim report in June 1931.(17) The PLP was equally frustrated due to the failure of the consultative machinery to work effectively. There was deep frustration over unemployment and a growing lack of confidence in the leadership.

Thorpe too has pointed out that by 1931 many local parties were experiencing considerable organisational and financial difficulties. Some were reported to be in a "state of unpreparedness" and with falling rolls. This forced the NEC to launch a special membership campaign in June 1931. Financial problems developed too as unemployment brought a fall in the numbers of union members 'contracting in'. The party had a deficit of £466 in 1930, which rose to £8,500 in 1931. The situation was such that in June 1931 Henderson, the treasurer, warned the NEC of the problem and in July he decided to ask the October conference to raise the subscription to 4d a year.(18)

Riddell has also pointed to the dissatisfaction with Labour in the constituencies, which was reflected in declining finances and membership, as well as tensions from the activities of the ILP and Mosleyites. Local parties cited "indifference" and "apathy", but there was general dissatisfaction with the government's failure to deal with unemployment. As membership fell local party affiliation fees to head office dropped from £4,363 in 1930 to £3,160 in 1931.(19) Riddell even claims that the membership figures for 1930 were deliberately falsified in 1931 in order to maintain the impression of constantly increasing numbers.(20)

Thorpe has claimed that by 1931 "two of the three main parties had run out of practical ideas as to how to deal with the problems of Britain and its ailing economy". He goes on to stress that once the



Conservatives had resolved their leadership crisis and developed their policies on tariff reform and financial retrenchment, "they seemed to be heading for a decisive electoral victory".(21)

On the 1<sup>st</sup> December 1930 Mosley issued his Manifesto, which called for short-term public work schemes, a national loan and a Cabinet of five overlords, along with Protection and Empire trade. It was signed by 17 MPs, of whom three (Brown, Baldwin and McShane) came from the Black Country and 8 from the West Midland region as a whole.(22) This partly reflected the pressure being put on them by Neville Chamberlain in Birmingham with his programme of Protection and a self supporting Empire. There was already talk in the local press of a National Government with capital and labour working together to face the economic crisis.(23) Although Chamberlain's campaign failed to secure him the Conservative leadership, it did eventually persuade Baldwin to take up Protection again, giving the Party a viable alternative economic policy, with which to challenge the Government.(24)

In January 1931 Mosley addressed the Smethwick Trades and Labour Council, claiming that his Manifesto had met with "an extraordinary response from the rank and file".(25) According to his biographer, Mosley intended meeting the Council again on the 25<sup>th</sup> February, but two days earlier the press leaked news of his intention to quit the Labour Party and form a new political party.(26) The first MPs to resign from the party were John Strachey of Birmingham Aston and Dr Robert Forgan of West Renfrew.(27) Two days later Oliver Baldwin joined them in what was intended to be a rolling programme of resignations.(28) Then on the 28<sup>th</sup> February Mosley revealed his plan to field 400 candidates for the New Party at the next General Election.(29)

An editorial in the Birmingham Gazette was highly critical of Mosley's tactics, pointing to "vaunting claims, muddle in regard to publicity and allowing subordinates to take the plunge of resignation before he has taken it himself" and of having "invested the birth of his new party with an atmosphere of farce".(30) Within a week the NEC had expelled Mosley from the party for "gross disloyalty" and resolved that "adhesion to the proposed New Party is incompatible with membership of the Labour Party". (31) Very little support, however, came from within the Labour Party with no District Parties joining him. Michael Foot, writing in his biography of Aneurin Bevan, claimed that Mosley had no love for the Labour Party, "no roots in it, no compunction at the breach with old comrades. He could leave as easily as he had joined, without a twinge of conscience or regret".(32) Skidelsky agreed to a certain extent, pointing out that Mosley's loyalty was not to the Labour Party. "Mosley himself would have said it was to his conceptions, which in turn were fixed by the sacred memories of the trenches".



Since the Labour Party had failed to realise these conceptions there was nothing to hold Mosley in the Party.(33)

By mid-1931 Thorpe describes “a tired and ageing premier”, presiding over “an ill, not infrequently incompetent and often acrimonious Cabinet”.(34) In February 1931 the May Committee had been set up on a Liberal amendment to investigate reductions in government expenditure. When it reported in July 1931 it called for £96 million of cuts. This in turn led in August to a financial crisis with a run on sterling. Snowden, having personally ruled out adopting a tariff, proposed a cut of 10 per cent in the unemployment benefit, which would enable him to balance his Budget and secure a loan from American bankers. The Cabinet was split, with the opposition led by Henderson and backed by the TUC. The Government resigned, but MacDonald was persuaded to stay on as Prime Minister by the King and the Opposition leaders. A National Government was formed, which included Snowden and Thomas, but was backed by only a dozen Labour backbenchers and no constituency parties or trade unions. The Labour Party now elected Henderson as their leader and came out against all cuts.

Although support for MacDonald’s move appeared to be minimal within the Labour movement, it did have a profound effect on morale. Riddell has made the point that “the latent support, which existed initially for MacDonald was more substantial than admitted subsequently and has been underestimated”. MacDonald had been “a figure of hero worship” amongst many of the rank and file, with many local parties reluctant to condemn him.(35) Furthermore MacDonald had been an inspirational election campaigner. His oratorical flair as a platform speaker at public meetings had won Labour considerable support.(36) The consequence of MacDonald’s departure was to leave much of the party in a demoralising state.

The National Government, having proceeded with the cuts and being forced to leave the Gold Standard, called a General Election for October 1931. MacDonald’s Government was far from united, with Conservatives wanting Protection, whilst the Liberals as well as Snowden standing by Free Trade. Baldwin, however, accepted that MacDonald’s leadership was necessary for the defeat of Labour. Each of the three parties issued its own manifesto, whilst MacDonald called for a ‘doctor’s mandate’ to use any methods fit to restore the economy. The government, however, was united in its vitriolic attack on the Labour Party, accusing it of running away from the crisis and threatening policies that would bring a total economic disaster.

One factor, which certainly affected Labour in the 1931 General Election, was that a united opposition faced them. Cook has written that “the once great Liberal Party had become, in reality if not in name, an adjunct of the Conservative Party”.(37) Labour fielded 516 candidates, but in over 400 constituencies the Party was faced by only one opponent. There were only 99 seats, where there were three-cornered contests, compared with 447 in 1929. The result was that Labour lost 215 seats, leaving them with only 52. The total vote, however, fell less dramatically from 8.37 million to 6.6 million, which in fact was Labour’s second highest vote ever at that time.

A key factor in the reversal in fortunes of the two main parties, which has been emphasised by Thorpe, was the Conservative’s adoption of Protection. This gave them a credible economic policy, with which to defend jobs at a time when unemployment was rising rapidly.(38) The Labour Party, on the other hand, stuck to Free Trade, on the grounds that it provided cheap food for the working class, arguing that Protection had failed in the United States and Germany.(39)

A report on the General Election was made to the Labour Party’s NEC, which put forward a number of explanations for the defeat. Most stress was put on the National Party’s election strategy. Backed by slogans such as ‘The Nation First’ and ‘Stand by the Nation’, MacDonald, Snowden and Thomas were portrayed as “having stood by the ship of state whereas their colleagues put party first”. Moreover they were reported as being able to create “the maximum of distrust and suspicion of their old colleagues by false statements, half truths and indirect suggestions regarding what had taken place in the Cabinet”.(40)

The NEC report made much of the denial of equality of political broadcasts for Labour. The 1931 General Election was probably the first to be influenced by radio broadcasts and sound cinema newsreels. In both instances the National Government benefited. The report complained that whilst Labour had only three broadcasts, the National Government had five before the election was called and seven during the campaign.(41) Indeed historians have drawn attention to the nature of the National Party’s broadcasts. In particular Snowden’s bitter party political broadcast, in which he referred to the Labour Party as ‘Bolshevism run mad’, was reckoned to have had a big influence. According to Mowat it “undoubtedly convinced many independent voters and many Labour men and women to vote against Labour as untrustworthy”.(42)

The press too, led by the Rothermere and Beaverbrook groups, was also overwhelmingly anti Labour in this Election. Only the Daily Herald, Manchester Guardian and Reynolds News backed Labour.(43)



Even Liberal papers like the News Chronicle warned of the dangers of the return of Labour. Thorpe, in his history of the Election, has described the press campaign as “unrivalled in its scurrility for 52 years”. Even so he believes it did not affect the result, except to cause Labour to lose more seats than they might otherwise have done. “To blame the press for Labour’s defeat is to blame the messenger for the message and to seek to evade unpleasant political realities”.(44) Yet the press at this time was the main source of political information and the Daily Herald with a circulation of just over 1.1 million by no means counteracted the other morning papers.

The aim of the National Government’s campaign was to frighten the electorate by warning that the return of a Labour Government would bring economic disaster. The Manchester Guardian described it as:- “the shortest, strangest and most fraudulent election campaign of our times”.(45) The National Government was, for instance, responsible for a number of notorious stunts, which were aimed at alarming the electorate. MacDonald displayed worthless German banknotes at meetings, as a warning of what might happen under Labour. Even more notorious was Runciman’s announcement, backed by Snowden, that the Labour Government had borrowed from the P.O. Savings Bank to meet the cost of unemployment insurance. Although it was later acknowledged that Churchill had done the same in the previous Conservative Government, Labour suffered as their policies were displayed as irresponsible. Smart, in a recent study of the National Government, accepts that few historians today would consider these stunts as “decisive”.(46) Nevertheless the reaction of contemporaries suggests that their impact on a population, which was still largely politically ignorant, was quite significant.(47) The growing role of the media at this election would have accentuated the situation.

The Labour Manifesto put much emphasis on the apparent breakdown of the capitalist system. The theory of the ‘banker’s ramp’, which had brought down the Labour Government was also widely proclaimed. There were promises of nationalisation, but not the specific policies needed to implement it. Tariffs were denounced, whilst industry and trade would be revived by national planning. Pledges were also made to restore the cuts in unemployment benefits and civil service salaries. This was not helped though by the exposure that over half the previous Cabinet had been prepared to implement the August cuts. Snowden claimed that the programme would “plunge the country into irretrievable ruin”, despite Labour’s promise to keep a balanced budget.(48) Thorpe describes the Manifesto as “a deeply self contradictory and rather irrelevant document in the conditions of 1931”. He goes on to claim that it



was adopted “more as an article of faith for the future and to keep what remained of the party together than as a programme for immediate government”.(49)

Although Labour performed badly in the 1931 General Election, the Liberals did even worse, despite the fact that 72 of their MPs were elected. In fact only 10 of the 72 faced Conservative opposition. Their total vote fell by over 3 million, compared with only 1½ million for Labour. Stevenson and Cook put the reason for this down to the flight of the middle classes to the Conservatives. This and the united front that the National Government presented is seen as the chief reason for Labour’s defeat rather than the desertion of the working class. This explains why the Labour vote held up to its 1929 level in South Wales and in mining seats in the North East. In fact Labour won three quarters of all mining seats, where less than 10 per cent of the electorate was middle class. They also point to a strong Labour vote in the railway towns of Swindon, Carlisle, Crewe and York. Elsewhere too they did best in working-class cities, like Stoke, Sheffield and Hull.(50) On the other hand Labour performed badly in middle-class seats as well as in working-class areas like Birmingham and the textile towns of South Lancashire, where tariff reform was the big issue.(51)

The 1931 municipal elections, which immediately followed the General Election, proved another setback for Labour. The party had a net loss of 201 seats, winning only 149 out of 709. Labour lost 92 seats in London, 12 in Birkenhead, 11 in Stoke and Bradford, 10 in Derby, 9 in Liverpool and Manchester, 8 in Sheffield and 6 in Nottingham. There were no Labour victories in Birmingham, Bradford, Birkenhead, Stockport or Middlesbrough. The party’s only successes were in Leeds, Sheffield and Manchester, which each elected 7 councillors.(52)

## B. REGIONAL DEVELOPMENTS

### 1. THE LABOUR PARTY IN BIRMINGHAM

The decline in Labour’s popularity after 1929 seemed to come earlier in Birmingham than elsewhere. Labour was confidently expecting to win three seats in the November municipal elections, but it was the Conservatives, who gained two seats, one from Labour and one from the Liberals. This left the Conservatives with a 72 to 36 lead over Labour on the Council. Yet in the same year Labour made five gains from the Conservatives in nearby Coventry.(53)

In 1930 Labour did even worse, suffering “a sharp setback”, losing 5 of the 10 seats that they contested in the city.(54) The Town Crier defended the position by pointing out that the total vote for



Labour in the city had remained stable, whilst they had also lost 6 seats in Sheffield, Liverpool and Plymouth, 5 in Salford and 4 in Cardiff and Blackburn. On the other hand the Labour Party was starting from a much lower base in Birmingham. The Town Crier believed that dissatisfaction with the Government's handling of the unemployment situation was not the main issue, as Labour had won seats in areas of high unemployment. Voters were reckoned to be upset by Labour's plans to raise the school leaving age to 15, whilst owner occupiers were influenced by the slogan 'Vote Tory and keep down the rates'.(55)

Divisions within the Borough Labour Party continued. At the Birmingham I.L.P. Conference in April 1930 the local branch led a move for disaffiliation from the Labour Party. Meanwhile the Town Crier, under its editor W.J.Chamberlain, attacked the activities of Maxton and his followers, as "providing anti-Labour press with a great deal of ammunition for use against the Labour Government".(56) In February 1931 at the Annual Conference of the Midland ILP a motion, moved by Joseph Southall of the Birmingham Federation, to cease affiliation to the Labour Party, was defeated. Two Birmingham MPs, Jim Simmons and Wilfred Whiteley, who had been nominated by ILP branches, were outlawed. In their place W.J.Brown and John Strachey were welcomed as new members, despite the fact that they had both signed the Mosley Manifesto, denounced by the National Council of the ILP.(57)

The activities of Oswald Mosley proved a more serious threat to the local party. In a speech to the Birmingham Business Club on 'The Problems of British Trade' in November 1930, Mosley gave notice of his intentions by stating that he did not believe that the emergency could be faced "with the present parliamentary system".(58) When Mosley issued his Manifesto in December 1930, the Town Crier was quite critical especially for its relegation of socialism and promotion of tariffs.(59) The Birmingham Labour Party then twice deferred from asking Mosley to address them, before eventually deciding not to invite him. Fearing his impact on the local party, it was felt that the invitation would serve "no good purpose"(60)

When Mosley made his move to form the New Party, the Birmingham Labour Party responded quickly. The president, J.Johnson, wrote in the Town Crier of "the tremendous blow ...being aimed at the Labour movement". Mosley and his supporters were described as "conspicuous more by self-advertisement than by faith" and of not having "the grounding in the work and the struggles of the movement". In another article 'The Watchman' wrote that "we of the Birmingham Labour movement



feel that you have let us down badly and justified all that your critics said about you when you came over to us".(61) Mosley's move was to be rejected by all the local parties in the city, whilst the Aston party cast out Strachey. Nevertheless it does appear that Mosley used Birmingham personnel for his London organisation, with Young becoming secretary of the New Party. In July 1931, however, as Mosley began to transfer the New Party into a Fascist movement, both Strachey and Young resigned.(62)

The impact of Mosley's departure on the Birmingham Labour Party is not clear-cut. Riddell, for instance, claims that he "heavily subsidised the local party and the Town Crier".(63) His departure meant that "organisation and morale were dealt a serious blow".(64) Hastings, however, has found it difficult to assess the extent of Mosley's involvement in the Birmingham Labour Party. "His sincerity was always doubted by certain sections... because of his ambition, vanity and large personal fortune". Certainly from the financial point of view Mosley appears to have done nothing to relieve it of its perennial debt.(65) His departure seemed to vindicate the left in the party, which had always distrusted his membership. Nevertheless Hastings still concludes that Mosley's desertion left the party machine in Birmingham "shattered for the second occasion in three years".(66)

Two months later, however, the Town Crier, under the heading 'Birmingham's Record Labour Day Rally', reported 20,000 people at Aston Park for the May-Day celebrations.(67) In September when Mosley returned to the city for a speech at the Town Hall, he encountered a hostile reception. When he addressed an overflow meeting of 5-6,000 outside his speech down was shouted down and he had to be escorted away by a bodyguard of police.(68) Mosley's reception here probably convinced him that it would be futile for him to stand in the city for parliament in the 1931 General Election.

The defection of MacDonald, Snowden and Thomas seem to have had a bigger impact on the Birmingham Labour Party. MacDonald had enjoyed considerable local popularity with the rank and file. It was his visit and speeches, which had done much to revive the party after Mosley's defection. Hastings claims that "the older members in Birmingham revered him" and after his departure the local party was "discredited in the public's eye".(69)

Party membership certainly took a dip in Birmingham during 1931. In 1929 total membership in Birmingham was 3,889, with Kings Norton and Yardley each having over 600 members.(70) By 1930 there had been a dramatic increase to 6,825, despite the rise in membership fees from 2d to 3d a year. This was also at a time when the party was showing a dip in support at municipal elections. Kings



Norton now had over 1,000 members, followed by 782 for Erdington, 755 for Moseley and 710 for Edgbaston.(71) In 1931, however, total membership had dropped to 5,603. The biggest declines were in Edgbaston, down to 490, and Erdington, down to 507. Yardley too dropped to 440, having maintained a total of 600 since 1926. Only West Birmingham showed an increase, rising from 600 to 624.(72) The figures tend to confirm Riddell's theory of a general decline in membership in 1931. Nevertheless it should be noted that the 1931 total was still well above that for 1929. The impression here is that Labour support held up well until the 1931 General Election and it was the actions of MacDonald rather than Mosley that brought the decline.

Birmingham was to be less seriously affected by the 1930's Depression than other industrial regions. Nevertheless unemployment here was significant, peaking at 76,000 in August 1931, which at 17.7 per cent was below the national rate of 20.7 per cent. Moreover the Birmingham total was only just above the post war figure of 73,681 for July 1922.(73) The reason for this was that the motor industry along with its component sections was much less affected by the Depression than other industries. Annual production was down by only 5 per cent between 1929-31. Indeed it began a revival in the autumn of 1931, which continued throughout the decade and helped the West Midlands as a whole avoid the worst of the Depression.(74)

The 1931 General Election in Birmingham proved to be a disaster for Labour with the Conservatives winning all twelve seats with five figure majorities. The total Labour vote also dropped by over a third.(75) Whereas in 1929 Birmingham had voted Labour above the national average, in 1931 the Labour vote was only 26.7 per cent compared with a national average of 30.6 per cent. Hastings describes the local Labour Party as being "back in its pre-war place".(76) Even the Conservatives were surprised by the size of their victory with the chief Unionist agent in Birmingham describing the result as "beyond our most optimistic expectations".(77)

It has been pointed out that since Labour's local success was "recently won and weakly rooted", the failure of the Labour Government in office in 1931 proved a serious blow.(78) At the start of the campaign The Times reckoned that the local Labour Party was in "particularly difficult circumstances". They pointed out that it had "plenty of candidates, a fairly large body of workers, but (was) suffering from a lack of funds and secondly from the lack of an outstanding figure". The Times believed that the departure of Mosley would be decisive since, despite Birmingham's reputation for enterprise and its thousand trades, "the Midlander ... loves to be led and has an unusual respect for authority".(79)

Mosley in fact made one infamous sortie into Birmingham, when he spoke at the Rag Market on the 18<sup>th</sup> October. After attempting to make himself heard for 20 minutes, uproar broke out amongst the 15,000 crowd, when Mosley's stewards moved towards a heckler. A large section of the crowd then charged the platform, "brandishing chairs and chair legs, hurling bottles and swept all before them". When Mosley showed a reluctance to leave, the police threatened to lock him up for his own safety. The Birmingham Gazette described the meeting as "one of the most extraordinary scenes that has marked Birmingham's parliamentary history".(80)

It is probable, therefore, that The Times reporter overestimated the significance of Mosley, especially given the later disastrous performance of the New Party in the Election itself. The two New Party candidates, which stood in Birmingham, for instance, secured only about 1 per cent of the vote.(81) The article, however, went on to touch upon a more significant factor, when it pointed to the National candidates support for Protection. It described a display van, which was being used to illustrate the effects of dumping on local industries. This was an issue, it claimed, which the Labour Party "having weakened on the question of Protection, finds it awkward to meet".(82)

Hastings also points out that manufacturers opened their factories to Unionist candidates often in works time and used their walls for displays.(83) At the end of the campaign the Liberal Birmingham Gazette agreed that "up to a point ... Birmingham has gone tariff. The Conservatives all stressed the need for tariffs in their election addresses and speeches".(84)

An equal disaster followed almost immediately for Labour with the 1931 municipal elections. In Birmingham the Unionists made "another clean sweep" with no Labour candidates being elected. They made 9 gains, giving them 70 seats on the Council compared with Labour's 15. This was a much worse performance than elsewhere in the Midlands.(85) The results reflected the shallowness of Labour's support in the city, where their organisation and finances remained much inferior to the Unionists.

## 2. THE LABOUR PARTY IN THE BLACK COUNTRY

### A. THE STATE OF LOCAL PARTIES 1929-31

By 1931 the Black Country was much more seriously affected by the Depression than Birmingham. Only Smethwick, with a figure of 18.9 per cent, had an unemployment rate as low as Birmingham's 17.9%. All other boroughs had rates above 20 per cent with Dudley having 38.8 per cent.(86) On the one hand there were industries in absolute decline like coal mining, domestic chainmaking and the iron



industry, whilst others like steel and glass making were badly affected by cheap imports. Those making components for the motor industry, however, were less affected, which explains the relatively low rate in Smethwick.

Support for Labour held up much better in the Black Country. The Party was still making gains, for instance, in the 1929 municipal elections. Two seats were captured in Stourbridge and one in Wednesbury, Wolverhampton and Smethwick. In West Bromwich Labour gained one seat, but lost one to the Liberals, who were in an electoral pact with the Conservatives (87) The Wednesbury result gave Labour control of the town for the first time.(88) Yet this and Smethwick were the only municipal boroughs that Labour were to control during the inter-war years, at a time when they had captured all but one of the parliamentary seats. The reasons for this disparity lie partly in the more restricted municipal franchise and partly in the numerous anti-socialist pacts. These existed in most boroughs and concentrated on appealing to ratepayers to keep down local authority spending and the rates.

Immediately after these elections further divisions were exposed in the Wolverhampton Labour Party. Under the heading 'Wolverhampton Labour Party Sensation' the Express and Star announced the expulsion from the Party of Councillor Miss Perry and G.T.Williams, who had stood in opposition to the official candidate at the local elections. Williams, who was a former Councillor and Chairman of the Wolverhampton Board of Guardians, had unsuccessfully sought the Labour nomination in two wards, before standing as an Independent. Miss Perry, who claimed that she had resigned from the Party the previous December over a disagreement over an educational grant, had nominated Councillor Haddock the opponent of the official Labour candidate. The publicity, which followed this rift, further exposed the local party as factious and disunited. In the newspaper article Williams accused the West Wolverhampton Labour Party of seeking "to commit political suicide by expelling all its intelligence and retaining only the brute force and ignorance".(89)

Labour lost seats in the Black Country in the 1930 municipal elections. In Smethwick the local party lost control of the Council to the Conservatives, who gained two seats. A number of local factors were thought to have influenced voting. In the first place the Labour Party's decision to oppose the Conservative mayor in the election, after he had agreed to accept a second term in office, was considered unpopular locally. Not only was the mayor re-elected, but the turnout in his ward was by far the highest in the borough.(90)

Another factor was thought to be the proposal to introduce a £3 a week minimum wage for council workers. The Conservatives argued that this would lead to an increase in rates, causing businesses to close down or move elsewhere. A Manufacturers' Manifesto was drawn up by major employers and distributed widely around the borough. They claimed that the scheme would cost them around £100,000 a year as the local wage for labourers, fixed by the Joint Industrial Council, was only £2 9s 2½d a week. Labour councillors sought to defend their stand by pointing to the benefits that the De-Rating Act had brought. Their position was undermined, however, by the steady rise in unemployment from 2,612 in mid January to 5,073 at the beginning of November.(91)

Elsewhere Labour lost seats in Dudley, Walsall, Wednesbury and West Bromwich. The result in Wednesbury meant that Labour lost control of the Council. In Wolverhampton Labour's two rebels had mixed fortunes. Councillor Perry held on to her seat as an Independent, but G.T.Williams failed to win in St. George's ward.(92) In July the Wolverhampton Labour Party had reported that "no ward (was) reaching their quota of contributory members". Graisleigh had 153, Dunstall 134, but the other five were only around 50.(93) Soon after the elections a special ward meeting was called to report on the state of the local party. The picture was similar with only Graisleigh and Dunstall in a healthy position. Elsewhere reports spoke of poor attendances at ward meetings (St George's and Park), "nothing being done" (St Mark's and St Matthew's) and "ward in a backward state ... requires reorganising" (Blakenhall and St John's). The Chairman Jacob concluded that the present situation was disappointing and appealed for "service to the party with the idea of stabilising the position".(94)

As Oswald Mosley and other Black Country MPs became more openly critical of the Government, there was a danger of further splits in local parties. When Mosley resigned from the Cabinet opinions locally were rather ambivalent with the Town Crier saying that their sympathy was "fairly equally divided" between him and the Cabinet.(95) John Strachey, writing in the same paper, claimed that if he thought that Mosley's action would lead to a split "(he) would never have given it (his) support for one moment".(96) When Mosley came to Smethwick in June he addressed the Trades and Labour Council, as well as an open air meeting of several thousand in Victoria Park. He claimed that his proposals would create work for 800,000 at a cost of £200 million.(97) Meanwhile, the local Trades and Labour Council recorded "its unabated confidence in Sir Oswald and assured him of its belief in his integrity and loyalty to the Labour Movement".(98)



There was more open criticism of Mosley, however, after the issue of his Manifesto. Writing in the Town Crier W.A.Exon pointed out that, although he agreed that new methods were needed to deal with unemployment, "I am not yet convinced that the Manifesto meets the case in every way". He did not "doubt Mosley's sincerity", but questioned the argument for tariffs, claiming that countries with Protection were suffering as badly as those without.(99)

Mosley's final contact with the Smethwick Labour Party came at a meeting in London with the president of the Trades and Labour Council, W.E.Lawrence, and its secretary and agent, J.Stonier. Here he explained his intention to form a new political party, expecting other groups, including the ILP, to join. The Smethwick pair apparently "begged him to reconsider, promising Smethwick's support if he stayed within the Labour Party".(100)

At a stormy meeting of the Smethwick Trades and Labour Council on the 25<sup>th</sup> February the rank and file made their views felt. The mood of the meeting was described as "ugly and antagonistic". There was criticism of Mosley's non-attendance and of his excuse of ill health.(101) Lawrence then gave an account of the meeting with Mosley, at which he had made it clear to the MP that, if he took up a position outside the party, the Council would not support him. Lawrence stressed that for him "loyalty to the Party comes before ... loyalty to any individual". He concluded by expressing his regrets "that the man to whom we looked up with such hope.... should have left us so high and dry".(102)

After further heated discussion, during which several delegates were accused of "having first hero-worshipped Sir Oswald and then fallen upon him tooth and nail", a resolution was passed inviting Mosley to address a private meeting of the Council.(103) The editor of the Birmingham Gazette wrote that "the Council came very near to making Sir Oswald a martyr by sacking him out of hand while he is ill. Fortunately a sense of fairness prevailed".(104) W.A.Exon summed up the situation accurately in the Town Crier, writing that "Mosley has made a big mistake. Always at the back of his mind he thought he could carry Smethwick with him. He knows different now".(105)

Mosley never attended the private meeting of the Trades and Labour Council, claiming that he was too unwell. In fact he made no commitment to meet representatives of the party in the future. There were further heated arguments locally before the Executive Committee decided that, if Mosley were to withdraw from the Party, he would no longer be supported as the borough member.(106) Within a week, however, the NEC had expelled Mosley from the party and he never returned to Smethwick.

According to his biographer Mosley himself reckoned that, had he not been unwell and been able to visit the constituency, he could have carried much of the local Labour Party.(107) This seems unlikely, although it is apparent that before his expulsion he still had some local support. In a letter to the Smethwick Telephone, Clem Jones, the first Labour agent in the borough, summed up what appears to be the majority local feeling:- “We did not spend years of effort in the Labour movement of Smethwick in order to make it the catspaw of a rich and ambitious man”.(108)

Meanwhile on the 26<sup>th</sup> February Oliver Baldwin sent a letter to the press, announcing his decision to resign from the Labour Party and stand as an Independent. He then confirmed his intention that evening at a meeting of the Executive Committee of the Dudley Labour Party. It appears from his letter that Baldwin hoped to carry the majority of his former supporters with him In this he was to show his lack of understanding of Labour politics at this time.(109)

In an interview with the Birmingham Gazette he criticised the Government for its “inaction” in the face of the developing economic crisis. He stressed his loyalty to the programme, on which he had fought the last election, but which “has been largely sacrificed, including national work schemes for the unemployed”. He predicted that Snowden’s financial policies would cut purchasing power, add to unemployment and bring “an inevitable reduction in the standard of living of the working classes”. He concluded by stating his intention of standing at the next election as an Independent.(110)

It seems that relations between Baldwin and some sections of the Dudley Labour Party had become strained even before the eventual breakdown. The Express and Star reported that the circumstances of his resignation “have created a crisis for the local Labour Party”. Not only was there no vote of confidence in Baldwin but “not a single member supported his attitude”. The issue was not so much his disagreement with the Government, with which attitude several left wingers were in agreement, but the method he had used “to engineer the position”. There was particular criticism of his letter to the press, giving the reasons for his resignation before he had even met the Committee. As the Labour agent, Harold Chambers, said:- “He need not have come to Dudley. The thing was cut and dried by him before we started. He has treated us shabbily”. A party member and town councillor was even more critical when interviewed by the paper:- “I should be really glad if I never saw Baldwin again. He has no sense of friendship and has either not the ability or the desire to get down to the real work of bringing in Socialism”.(111)



Baldwin was billed to speak on the New Party platform in Birmingham on the 8th March but failed to put in an appearance. Instead he stated his determination to fight the next election as an Independent. He did, however, speak at a meeting of the Conservative candidate in the St George's by-election, although this was mainly to condemn his Beaverbrook backed Empire Free Trade opponent. Later he appeared on a platform with Lady Cynthia Mosley at a meeting held under the auspices of the New Party. The local Labour Party wanted him to resign his seat. At a meeting of the Executive Committee on the 19<sup>th</sup> March to consider possible replacement candidates, some disapproval of their stand was expressed. Two members withdrew from the meeting and one of them resigned from the Party.(112)

Baldwin's response to calls for his resignation was to declare that he would contemplate it "if you can show me any vote I have given in the House of Commons, which is contrary to my election pledge" or name any previous Dudley MP, who has voted as regularly as himself. He then accused the local Labour Party of being "more concerned with a party machine than they are with the principles of Socialism".(113)

Harold Chambers replied by pointing to Baldwin's apparent link with Mosley's New Party, which had abandoned Socialism and had been denounced by James Maxton, who had previously spoken in Dudley on behalf of Baldwin. In the end there was to be no split in the local party. Members even passed a unanimous resolution thanking Baldwin for his services.(114) In fact Baldwin never joined the New Party and rejoined the Labour Party after the events of August 1931, standing unsuccessfully as their candidate for Chatham in the General Election.(115)

Whilst the activities of Mosley and Baldwin failed to arouse sufficient support to allow the emergence of local factions, the situation was much different in the case of W.J.Brown in Wolverhampton. This might well have been because, whilst Mosley and Baldwin were upper class outsiders with few links with the working class, Brown was a trade union official with roots in the Labour movement. In fact it was in his role as secretary of the Civil Service Clerical Association, that he made his bitterest attacks on the Labour Government, which was seeking to cut public service pay early in 1931.

Brown had been a critic of the Government's economic policy from as early as January 1930, when he informed his local Executive Committee of his intention of following an independent line on government policy. He did give a pledge not to vote against the government on anything that was in the Party's 1929 election programme or to endanger the life of the government.(116) In March 1930

Brown urged the government to disarm unilaterally, voting with a group of 22 for an amendment to reduce naval armaments and in another to cut the army estimates.(117) He joined the breakaway ILP faction, becoming its secretary for a time and providing a link with the Mosleyites.(118) There was, however, much political jealousy between the ILP and Mosley. The Left considered Mosley's schemes as 'reformism', whilst Mosley regarded the Left as 'impossiblist'.(119) Riddell claims that Brown took more of a Maxtonite than a Mosleyite stand during the debate on the King's speech in October 1930 by calling for immediate socialisation.(120)

Having signed the Mosley Manifesto in December, Brown's activities provoked a special Executive Committee meeting of his local Labour Party on the 13<sup>th</sup> January 1931. It was decided to put a number of points to Brown and to ascertain his attitude to the government at a future General Election.(121) Brown met the Committee on the 18<sup>th</sup>, where he must have been encouraged by the knowledge, reported by the secretary, that the local party was "divided in its opinions" over the attitude he had adopted towards the government. Brown made no apologies, claiming that he intended going on in the same way, "believing that his personal standing was now much stronger".(122) The Wolverhampton West Labour Party was anxious to avoid a confrontation with him.(123) Not only would this bring a likely division in their local party, it also threatened its finances as Brown's Civil Service Association provided an annual parliamentary fund of £250. This was a significant sum for a local party, which had a £50 deficit and was expressing concern over its inability to collect individual membership subscriptions.(124)

On the 12<sup>th</sup> February Brown was expelled from the Trade Union Parliamentary group, following an attack on Snowden's decision to cut the bonus paid to Civil Service clerks.(125) In an interview with the Express and Star he criticised the Government for abandoning the interests of the working class and becoming "the custodian of the very interest it was decided to oppose". He claimed that sacrifices should only be called from all classes, "if we fail to do our duty in respect of the bond holders and the rentiers, who prey upon manufacturers and workmen alike". Asked whether he would stay within the Labour Party, he replied that if there were a separation, it would be "because the party is leaving its declared principles not because I am". On the question of tariffs he replied that "the common sense of the situation points to the scientific control of imports with proper safeguards for consumer and workman".(126)



At this point it seems certain that Brown was planning to leave the Labour Party and join the New Party. Writing later in his autobiography Brown showed his admiration for Mosley, claiming that he thought that "he really did want to get something done". He blamed the Labour establishment, who saw him as an outsider and "a young man in a hurry", for keeping him out of the Cabinet. There was also a certain amount of class prejudice involved. Brown concluded bitterly by writing:- "Let those who attack and deride him for 'going Fascist', ask themselves how much they contributed to the disillusionment and bitterness, which led him along that path".(127)

It was intended that Brown should speak on the New Party platform on the 22<sup>nd</sup> February and to take the lead in announcing his resignation from the Labour Party on the 23<sup>rd</sup>. Instead Brown withdrew from the meeting, pleading ill health and never joined the New Party. In his autobiography he claimed that he held back after reading Mosley's interview in the Observer, in which he likened his movement to Hitler's in Germany.(128) A different reason appeared in the press. It was claimed that the executive of the Civil Service Clerical Association objected to Brown's move and threatened to withdraw their sponsorship of him, if he joined the New Party.(129) Mosley, himself, agreed with this interpretation of events in his autobiography, claiming that Brown told him "he would lose his job and his family would be ruined". Yet Mosley, himself, admitted that he had a guarantee from Lord Nuffield to cover Brown's salary.(130)

Another ILP member, who had also signed the Mosley Manifesto, was J. MacShane, the Walsall MP. He too was due to speak on the same platform as Lady Cynthia Mosley on the 22<sup>nd</sup> February. He also withdrew his support at the last moment, claiming that he was prepared to support action within the Party, but not to leave it. In an interview with the Wolverhampton Express and Star on the 23<sup>rd</sup> February he said:- "Possibly something of Hitler's National Socialism may be on their minds, with more emphasis on nationalism than socialism. If this be so I am not prepared to support Hitlerism either in Germany or in Britain".(131)

On the same date the Executive Committee of the Wolverhampton Labour Party received a telegram from Brown, asking for a meeting to be arranged at the Theatre Royal.(132) On the 26<sup>th</sup> a letter was received stating that he would arrange for publicity and advertisements, whilst his agent, Mr Jacob, should arrange for a Chairman and stewards. He pointed out that Lady Cynthia Mosley would be present. The Executive resolved to do nothing in connection with the meeting, unless it went through the agent and was called "under the auspices of the West Wolverhampton Labour Party". The

Committee also heard that, although they had received £20 from Brown's parliamentary fund, the grant was to be withdrawn. Three months notice was then given to the agent and to the landlord to terminate their tenancy of the Labour rooms.(133)

Meanwhile Brown himself was suspended by the House of Commons for persisting in asking questions on the Civil Service bonus payments after the Speaker had asked him to resume his seat. His suspension, moved by Snowden himself, was carried by 296 votes to 17.(134) Brown later described Snowden "as the rock on which the British Labour movement broke".(135) On the 5<sup>th</sup> March Brown announced that he was leaving the Parliamentary Labour Party. In his resignation letter to MacDonald he explained that the character of the party had been "gradually and skilfully changed from that of a Socialist party to that of a Social Reform party".(136) In an interview with the Express and Star Brown stressed his desire to stay loyal to his election pledges. He went on to say that if he had believed it were possible to reform the government from within the party, he would have "refrained, in spite of my profound differences with the government's line, from taking this step". Eighteen months experience, however, had convinced him "that this was not possible".(137)

The local Labour Party voted only narrowly to stay impartial over Brown's meeting and then carried a motion to take no further action against him "until the national party has given its decision".(138) Brown postponed his Theatre Royal meeting due to illness. In a letter to the Express and Star he made it clear that he did not intend joining any other party. "I shall support the government's foreign policy, oppose Mr Snowden's financial policy, resist any attempt to worsen the position of the unemployed and do my best to stimulate the government to more effective action on unemployment".(139)

On the 25<sup>th</sup> March the Executive Committee held a special meeting with Mr Shepherd, the Labour Party National Agent, to deal with Brown's resignation from the Parliamentary Labour Party. Shepherd pointed out that resignation from the PLP meant resignation from the party. He stated that the next step was to select a new candidate and outlined the various procedures. A move to ask Brown to resign his seat was defeated by 7 votes to 2.(140) On the following day a full party meeting was held, which confirmed the recommendations of the Executive Committee. An amendment, challenging Brown's exclusion from the Labour Party, was defeated by 25 votes to 12.(141)

The vote reflected the split, which Brown's move had made in the local Labour Party. Resignations were already taking place with one of the earliest being that of the former agent, Don Davies, who



joined Mosley's New Party.(142) No councillors were involved, but on the 7<sup>th</sup> May it was reported that there were ten vacancies on the Executive Committee due to resignations.(143)

One major problem for the local party was to be finance, as it had lost the Parliamentary Fund from Brown's union. On the 2<sup>nd</sup> April a deficit of over £73 was announced, which had risen to £123 by the end of the month.(144) Support from Labour Party HQ was sought, leading to another meeting with the national agent, Shepherd, on the 2<sup>nd</sup> June. He suggested setting up a series of public and private meetings using local Labour MPs, the selection of a new parliamentary candidate and the taking out of a loan.(145)

Meanwhile Brown's union executive voted 17 to 2 in favour of terminating his political candidature. When the matter was debated, however, at the Annual Conference of the Civil Service Clerical Association, Brown swung the delegates round overwhelmingly to his side with a dramatic speech.(146) Thus financed by his union, Brown and his supporters formed the Independent Labour Association. One organisation that decided to back him was the local branch of the ILP.(147) Indeed in his autobiography Brown claimed support from "the bulk of the individual membership of the local Labour Party".(148) The evidence from the Labour Party Annual Report does not totally support this. It does show membership rising from a lowly 300 in 1928 and 1929 to 650 in 1930, with a fall back to 400 in 1931.(149) Moreover on the 4<sup>th</sup> June 1931 Labour won a by-election victory in the St Matthews ward, where even in 1929 they had failed.(150)

The only other elections held at this time were those for urban and rural district councils held on the 30<sup>th</sup> March. Nothing in these results would suggest that Labour was on the edge of an electoral disaster. In Oldbury, for instance, Labour won four of the seats that were being contested, making three gains.(151) In Rowley Regis Labour lost three seats in the chain making ward of Cradley Heath, but gained three in Rowley and one in Old Hill. Labour also made a net gain of one seat in Brierley Hill. The only disaster was in Tipton, where Labour lost control of the Council, losing eight seats to Conservatives or Independents.(152)

At the end of April the Stourbridge Divisional Labour Party held its annual meeting. It reported an increase in individual membership of the party and of the number of bodies affiliated to it. The party's representation in local government was up by 7, with 19 Labour councillors and 1 alderman plus 2 Labour County councillors. There were no hints here of a future electoral disaster as the MP, Wellock, outlined strategies for the party.(153) Indeed the Annual Report confirms the progress made in

Stourbridge at this time. Membership had risen from 600 in 1928 to 930 in 1929, 1,010 in 1930 and 1,079 in 1931. This was by far the largest membership of any of the Black Country constituencies, overtaking Bilston in 1930. Interestingly the corresponding figures for Smethwick, which had Mosley as its MP, show a much lower and static membership of 240.(154)

It would appear that, apart from the three constituencies that were affected by the defections, the Labour Party in the Black Country was not greatly influenced by these events. The New Party, in fact, put up no candidates in the region in the 1931 General Election, with Mosley, himself, preferring to stand in Stoke. This was in spite of claims in the local Smethwick press, that he was receiving “hundreds of letters” urging him to fight the seat again.(155)

The collapse of the Labour Government in August 1931, however, appears to have had a bigger impact. MacDonald had always been a popular speaker in the region, especially after Mosley’s defection. The Town Crier, for instance, reported a speech he made in West Bromwich on the 17<sup>th</sup> April 1931. “It was a wonderful meeting. Every foot of space was filled with people, who had come to give MacDonald practical expression of their loyalty to him and the great Labour movement he and they had built up”. As to the speech itself W.A.Exon wrote of MacDonald “pleading, ironic, sarcastic; hitting hard and often; he moved that mighty audience as easily as the organist did the organ”.(156)

When the Town Crier reported the defection of MacDonald and Snowden there was much moderation in its tone. Its main headline stated that they had chosen the “Wrong Road” out of a “Mistaken Sense of Duty”. The paper concluded its article by calling for “no bitterness in our strenuous opposition to their policy”.(157) Even so none of the local Black Country parties backed MacDonald, with the Walsall party passing a resolution backing Labour policy.(158)

## B. THE 1931 GENERAL ELECTION

### 1. SMETHWICK

In Smethwick the nominations to replace Mosley as Labour candidate all came from local politicians. Eventually W.E.Lawrence, President of the Trades and Labour Council, was selected ahead of G.F.Betts and A.M.Willetts.(159) The Birmingham Post described him as having “none of the airs and graces of his predecessor, nor is he a very effective speaker”.(160) Even W.A.Exon gave him less than fulsome praise:- “Whatever Ernie’s faults and failings may be, nobody can question his honest, unswerving faith and belief in the Labour movement and that will always blot out smaller things, as far



as I am concerned".(161) The Conservative candidate, supporting the National Government, was again A.R.Wise, who was a firm believer in the two key policies of tariff reform and economy in public spending.

Unemployment in Smethwick, which had stood at 5,117 at the end of November 1930, climbed to 7,522 at the time of the fall of the Labour Government in August 1931. It then continued to rise, peaking at 8,821 on the 3<sup>rd</sup> October, which was reported as the highest since 1921. In the weeks leading to the General Election, however, the figure dropped to 7,301, which provided good news for Wise.(162) He reinforced his tariff policy by using a 'dumping' van to tour the constituency, exhibiting a selection of dumped articles, which, he claimed, could have been made in Smethwick.(163)

The problem for Labour was that it lacked a viable policy to fight unemployment. Lawrence opposed any tariffs, claiming that they would "hinder the recovery of the export trade and result in increases in the cost of living".(164) He did not help himself by informing his audiences that "unemployment was a necessity of capitalism".(165) Labour was also affected by the absence this time of a Liberal candidate, whose supporters were more likely to support the National ticket and vote Conservative. Also worrying for Labour was the report in the Birmingham Gazette of "apathy" amongst the electorate, which implied that the party's internal troubles were having an impact on their voters.(166) Significantly the turnout of 74.7 per cent was down from the 78.9 per cent of 1929.

The result was to be a heavy defeat for Labour with Wise winning by over 7,000 votes, which proved to be the second largest Conservative majority in the Black Country. Given the strong roots of the party in Smethwick going back to before the First World War, the result reflected the disarray of the local Labour Party. Indeed Lawrence admitted that when parliament was dissolved, the local Party "did not think they would be able to fight an election at all".(167) W.A.Exon, in the Town Crier blamed the impact of Conservative scare stories. Claims such as "They want your savings" and "There will be no money to pay unemployment benefit by the middle of November" were thought to have had a big impact on the working class.(168)

## 2. WOLVERHAMPTON WEST

The Labour Party was in an even worse state in Wolverhampton West, where an official candidate was not even selected to fight the seat. Attempts to find one foundered on the financial position, which the local party was left in, following the defection of W.J.Brown.(169) The MP, himself, financed by

the Civil Service Clerical Association and backed by the locally formed Independent Labour Association, sought some sort of arrangement with the Labour Party. In a meeting with the local party secretary, Brown endeavoured to secure their backing on the condition that they stood by their Scarborough Conference policy. He promised that he would only vote against the party, if they departed from that policy. If an agreement were reached, Brown's ILA would be disbanded and a united front presented at the General Election.(170) The Executive Committee of the Labour Party could not accept the terms, although they resolved not to fight the seat themselves. They also made a pledge "to refrain from speaking or working for an unofficial candidate"(171)

Wolverhampton West was one seat which Ramsay MacDonald hoped would be contested by a National Labour candidate. In fact, Ernest Stanford appeared in the constituency, backed by MacDonald's private Parliamentary secretary, Markham, with the instructions: "It is essential that you should contest Wolverhampton West".(172) A letter followed from MacDonald, offering "my heartfelt good wishes for your triumph and success".(173) The West Wolverhampton Conservative Association, however, confirmed their support for Sir Robert Bird as the National candidate. Stanford eventually agreed to withdraw saying that "it is impossible to expect the Conservative candidate to stand down, having regard to his traditions in the constituency".(174)

The contest thus became a straight fight between Brown and Bird. Bird claimed that the priority was not tariffs but the need for government by "strong, prudent and resourceful men" from all parties.(175) At the same time he sought to reassure Liberal voters by stressing that the policy of the National Government was not "a tariff policy", but they would provide "a thorough and impartial consideration of tariffs among a number of other proposals".(176)

In his election address Brown made clear his opposition to tariffs. He also called for the restoration of the cuts in the pay of public workers and unemployment benefit, a reduction in spending on armaments, a living wage and a cut in working hours to absorb the unemployed.(177) Brown later complained that a number of local firms, such as the Wolverhampton Steam Laundry, were circulating or putting up posters in their works against him.(178) The Wolverhampton Conservatives were quick to misrepresent Brown's position. He was forced to deny first that he was a member of the Communist Party and then that he was an atheist. He was also accused of being "the holder of rather extreme Socialist views", whose local party "did not go far enough for him" and have consequently "left him severely alone in this fight".(179)



The outcome was a sweeping victory for Bird with a majority of over 9,000. In his autobiography Brown called it “a remarkable result”, since, “without the aid of the local machine, I polled over 17,000 votes, only 4,000 less than the number with which I had won the seat”.(180) For the Wolverhampton Labour Party the events of 1931 were to prove a disaster, with Brown and his ILA supporters remaining and contesting seats on the borough council.

### 3. DUDLEY

The third Black Country Labour MP to defect from the Labour Party had been Oliver Baldwin. A new candidate, William Hadgkiss, a former Smethwick councillor, was selected to replace him in Dudley. Hadgkiss had entered Smethwick Council in 1926 as a Conservative, before switching to Labour. He became an alderman, but was voted off the Council when the Conservatives regained control in 1930. On his adoption the local press described him as “an able speaker, who has done a great amount of spadework for the Labour Party and has been much sought after as a parliamentary candidate”.(181)

At first the Liberals selected Alderman F.J.Ballard as their candidate to stand on the National ticket with a free hand on the question of tariffs.(182) Within a few days, however, Ballard had agreed to withdraw and throw his support behind the Conservative candidate, Dudley Joel.(183) This was later approved in a vote by the local Liberals with only one opposing voice.(184) Nevertheless Joel started his campaign as a firm tariff reformer, claiming that it was “not Free Trade but free imports”.(185) He also spoke in favour of Imperial Preference.(186) Later, anxious to secure Liberal votes, he toned this down, emphasising instead that the election was a question of “national solvency or national bankruptcy”.(187)

Hadgkiss in fact fought a strong Free Trade campaign, raising the issue of the standard of living of the working class. This obviously worried Joel, who claimed that his opponent was not “a doctrinaire Free Trader” and his Party was only “half hearted” in their advocacy of it.(188) Joel secured a statement from the Chairman of the Dudley Liberal Association, in which he warned that “if tempted to vote for a Socialist, who happens to be a Free Trader, it must be remembered that his vote in parliament will be cast in general against the National Government and in favour of proposals, which when carried would aggravate our financial difficulties”.(189) Later when Joel sought to use Ballard at his meetings, the Liberal was shouted down with cries of ‘Traitor’.(190)

Hadgkiss suffered badly at the hands of the local press, which described him as “one of the more extreme members of the Socialist Party”.(191) His policies were criticised as a call for more socialism to cure the nation’s economic problems.(192) The Dudley Herald printed an article under the heading ‘New Hope for the Black Country’, in which they put the blame for unemployment on Free Trade, as it had brought the dumping of foreign goods and the closure of local industries. They saw new hope in the setting up of a National Government under MacDonald, warning that the return of Labour would lead to a collapse similar to that in Germany in 1923.(193) The same tone was adopted in an open letter sent to Joel by Stanley Baldwin, which warned of a “catastrophe” for the nation if Labour were returned.(194)

A more immediate scare came from one of the directors of the Round Oak Steel Works, who stated that the return of the National Government was imperative, warning that another Labour Government would lead to the closure of the plant within three months.(195) Meanwhile an editorial in the Dudley Herald claimed that the Labour Government had brought on the crisis “by their own squandermania” and had then “run away rather than take the measures, which were necessary to balance the nation’s budget”. Rather misleadingly it praised Joel for seeking “to abolish those cuts in the pay of the services and the unemployment benefit, which the late Socialist Government rendered necessary”.(196)

Hadgkiss’s response to all this was to point out that it was the working classes who were making all the sacrifices.(197) In fact support for him held up well, with the Labour vote falling by only 1,500 from 47.6 per cent to 43.1 per cent. Joel’s victory margin of 3,904 was less than the size of the Liberal vote in 1929. Much of the credit for this rests with the campaign fought by Hadgkiss, who remained a popular candidate throughout. Afterwards he admitted that “the forces arranged against us have been tremendous and, having regard to the happenings in other constituencies all over England, I think that we in Dudley have posted a magnificent result”.(198) Evidence from the Labour Party’s Annual Report supports this view, showing a big increase in party membership in Dudley during this troubled period. The 1931 Report gives a figure of just 240 for 1930, but this rose dramatically to 880 for 1931 and 1,561 for 1932, which was the largest in the region.(199) The figures suggest that with the departure of Oliver Baldwin, the local party was forced to expand its membership in order to meet its financial obligations. This they were able to do during this period despite political defeat and economic depression.



#### 4. WALSALL

Another Labour MP who had been critical of the Labour Government, was J.J.McShane of Walsall. He had backed the breakaway ILP group, which in October 1930 had decided to work independently of the Labour Party. In December he signed the Mosley Manifesto. In January 1931 Mosley visited Walsall to support McShane, who called for vigorous and decisive action against unemployment.(200) When Mosley broke away to form the New Party, however, McShane refused to join, arguing that “the man who seeks to break up and start a new party knows nothing of the working-class movement”.(201)

McShane had worked hard to ensure that the Walsall Labour Party remained well organised after his 1929 victory. Reports in October 1929, for instance, pointed to 31 women attending a lecture given by the Women’s section, whilst the Men’s section pledged to develop an organisation in any ward, where it was lacking.(202) As early as January 1930 McShane had warned delegates of “the necessity of keeping the work going as it was anticipated that there would be an early appeal to the country”.(203) The same message was stressed at the AGM, where the party declared itself free of debt. Wards were urged to be active, arranging “to have boards for publicity purposes” and to hold Sunday night meetings.(204) In June McShane backed a decision to appoint an organiser for the party on £4 a week.(205) A month later he was again stressing the importance of organisation, warning of the proximity of a General Election, “at which we should be fighting a defensive action”.(206)

Ward reports in February 1931 showed the Labour Party to be far more active in Walsall than in Wolverhampton. The Bloxwich Ward, for instance, stressed the financial support that the people were giving the party.(207) When McShane addressed a meeting in April, he praised “the propaganda effect” of the Sunday evening meetings. He also advised members to visit trade union branches, promising to go himself “if need be”.(208) McShane was also careful to keep his local party informed of his voting record in the Commons. In defending his line on opposing any introduction of a Means Test, he informed the delegates that “many members of our party were middle class and did not understand the position of the workers as fully as should be desired”.(209) Despite voting against the Government’s Education Bill, he received a vote of confidence at his party’s AGM in January 1931.(210)

Walsall was one of the Black Country towns to be most affected by unemployment with numbers rising from about 4,000 in 1929 to 12,000 in 1931.(211) Dean has claimed that its Poor Rate, set at £1.5s per head, was the third highest in the country.(212) When the General Election was called, McShane warned of “the need to fight hard because a stormy time was ahead and every ounce of

energy would need to be expended in order to win". The party organiser, Councillor Whiston, selected various headings, with which he addressed delegates, warning also of the need for "discipline and real obedience".(213)

A newspaper, McShane's Special, was produced in an attempt to put Labour's case. In it McShane stressed his belief that capitalism had broken down and the future lay with Socialism. He expressed his firm opposition to tariffs, claiming that they would not solve unemployment, but would threaten exports.(214) McShane also promised work through opening trade with Russia, where he claimed "millions of horses" wanted saddles.(215)

McShane's opponent was J.A.Leckie, who was a local leather manufacturer and Chairman of the Walsall Liberal Association. Since the Walsall seat had been a three cornered contest during the 1920s, the Conservatives agreed to drop their candidate and back Leckie as a National Liberal so long as he agreed to "vote for any policy brought in by the National Government".(216) In the past Leckie had been a supporter of Free Trade, but Labour sought to exploit this agreement by claiming that it meant he would now back tariffs.(217) At the same time, however, Leckie attacked McShane, as a signer of the Mosley Manifesto, for appearing to show support for Protection. Furthermore in an answer to a question on dumping McShane was refuted to have said:- "I believe in Protection. I am not fighting the election on Free Trade".(218) In reality, however, both candidates were anxious to stress their Free Trade credentials, in order to secure the large Liberal vote.

McShane, like other Black Country Labour MPs, was threatened by leafleting from local employers. On this occasion employees of George Wheway and Son received instructions in their pay packets telling them to vote for the National candidate "if they valued their jobs".(219) Thorpe dismisses this sort of intimidation, claiming that it was no worse than accusations from Labour politicians in the Daily Herald that workers, who voted for the National Government, were blacklegs.(220) Leckie's campaign, however, descended in the last week to further scaremongering, when he warned of the collapse of the country's finances and the loss of working-class savings in the Post Office if Labour were returned. McShane was not helped either by an outbreak of rowdiness at Leckie's meetings, which encouraged the opposition to brand the Labour Party as wreckers of the country.(221)

The result was a victory for Leckie with a majority of 6,555. McShane, however, performed creditably, increasing the Labour vote by around 3,000 and his share of it from 39.6 per cent to 44 per cent.(222) He put his defeat down to the various scare stories, the attitude of the press and intimidation



by employers.(223) The absence of a Liberal candidate was an even more significant factor. Indeed the relatively low swing against Labour owed much to McShane's work. He had campaigned tirelessly in Parliament for working-class causes, whilst in his constituency he had substantially improved party organisation. Perhaps of even greater significance was the fact that he appeared to have healed the long standing divisions within the local Labour Party.

## 5. WOLVERHAMPTON EAST

In the Wolverhampton East constituency Labour once again found itself the third party in the contest. The reason for this was the refusal of the Conservatives to back Geoffrey Mander as the National Liberal candidate. This was despite the fact that Mander was a member of the Samuel Liberals, who were supporting the National Government. The Wolverhampton Conservatives, seeing the election as an opportunity to break the Liberals hold on the constituency, refused to drop their candidate, Major Taylor, despite national agreements. Their argument was that the Liberals had backed the minority Labour Government, whilst Mander was inconsistent in his support of the National Government.(224) Indeed Mander had shown his radicalism by voting against the government's cuts in unemployment benefits.(225)

In these circumstances it was inevitable that the Labour candidate, John Smith, would find his support squeezed. This was even more the case, as the main issue in the election was tariffs. Taylor went further even than most Conservatives by proposing tariffs on foreign food to protect British farming.(226) Leo Amery was again drafted into the constituency, proclaiming that three months more of Free Trade would bring food to "famine prices".(227) At Willenhall in the heart of the constituency, the Birmingham Post reported one lock manufacturer as stating that £10-12,000 worth of foreign locks were being imported into the country every month, which might have been made locally. Nevertheless the paper thought that the lockworkers would not break with their past tradition of voting for the Liberals.(228)

Mander remained an opponent of tariffs, although he was "prepared to consider them with an open mind, as a means of restricting certain luxury imports".(229) He was accused in the press of seeking to have it both ways. On the one hand he attracted the votes of opponents of the government, having voted against their cuts in unemployment benefit. On the other he sought to exploit the Liberals association with the National Government with posters proclaiming:- "Trust Mander who trusts the National

Government” and “The National Government should include all parties; send Mander back to give the Liberal flavour”.(230)

With his reputation for being something of a radical, Labour could make little impression on Mander’s support. In fact the Liberal tactics in Wolverhampton East were a lesson to the Labour Party as the result was another victory for them. Although Mander’s majority was cut to 2,317, this was the only seat, which the Conservatives failed to capture in the region. Indeed the Labour vote was further squeezed, falling by 2,500 to 6,340. Mander acknowledged that his victory was due to the “devotion and faithfulness of the people of East Wolverhampton to the cause of Liberalism and Free Trade”.(231)

## 6. STOURBRIDGE

Another constituency which had a three cornered contest was Stourbridge. Here the Conservatives, having won three elections in the 1920s, claimed that their candidate, R.H.Morgan, was entitled to stand as the sole National representative. The Liberals, however, had appointed Donald Finnemore, the president of the Birmingham Liberal Association, as their candidate. Finnemore, who had fought the 1929 Election, stated:- “I have been here since 1928. Why should I stand down for a man, who has been a candidate for twelve months”. Morgan, on the other hand, had received a personal letter from Baldwin, officially acknowledging his stand as the Conservative candidate.(232)

Since no agreement was reached, the split gave Wellock, the Labour MP, a chance to retain his seat. Wellock was a member of the ILP and Chairman of the Parliamentary Peace Group. He had avoided any of the controversy associated with the ILP, being appointed Chairman of a Select Committee for the promotion of development schemes by local authorities. He had also avoided any association with the Mosley group.

In his Election Address he declared that “capitalism throughout the world is collapsing”, which was something he had long predicted. He rejected tariffs claiming that they would only lead to higher tariffs in return, as well as higher prices. Instead he called for state control of the economic resources of the country with the setting up of Import Boards for bulk exchange with other countries.(233) In one of his Free Trade posters he warned that workers in tariff countries had “longer hours, lower wages, black bread and margarine, horse flesh and mangel wurzel soup”.(234) Wellock also campaigned against the cut in unemployment benefit and the Means Test, which was due to be implemented after the election. He described these as “a betrayal of the unemployed” and “a crowning infamy”.(235)



Morgan, who was the headmaster of a Dudley school, put most emphasis in his campaign on tariff reform, whilst Finnemore was a strong Free Trader. The Conservatives were able to point to the revival locally of the enamelled hollow ware industry, which was safeguarded, comparing it favourably with depressed industries such as iron, steel, coal, glass and chain making, which were not.(236)

The fact that Stourbridge was a three-cornered contest did not save Wellock. In fact Finnemore, the Liberal candidate, campaigned on the same issues as Labour, attacking the Government's cuts in unemployment benefit and the introduction of a Means Test.(237) Morgan won by 3,742 votes, increasing the Conservatives vote by nearly 5,000 to 22,652, whilst Wellock dropped 2,433 votes to 18,910. Finnemore's vote remained static at just over 16,000. The Labour vote held up well in this constituency with a below average swing to the Conservatives. One reason for this could have been the strength of the local party, whose membership, numbering 1,079 in 1931, was easily the highest in the region.(238)

## 7. BILSTON

Labour had held this seat since 1924, with their MP, John Baker, having a majority of over 5,000 in the 1929 election in a three cornered contest. This time, however, he had just one opponent, the Conservative, G.K.Peto, who was a former MP and experienced parliamentarian.(239) Baker fought the election with a left wing programme, calling for the need "to take over the land and many if not all our industries".(240) In his Election Manifesto he stressed his fight "to raise the standard of living of the people". He advocated "higher wages, shorter hours and better conditions of work; higher education, better sanitation and greater leisure so that the workers might have a higher standard of living, better health and greater hygiene".(241) The local party still retained their active agent, Sam Hague, who had helped to boost individual membership to 750 in 1931 after it had slipped back to 240 in 1930.(242)

Peto had the personal endorsement of the ex-Liberal candidate.(243) Moreover, like most Black Country Conservative candidates, he took a strong stand on tariff reform.(244) Gardner in his survey of the Conservative Party in Wolverhampton at this time, suggests that despite the backing of the Hickman family, the Party was short of funds and without a full time agent.(245) One concern for Peto was a rumour that he was a foreigner, which led him to send an open letter of denial to the local press.(246)

. Peto won with a majority of 3,773. The Conservative vote increased by about a half, giving them 55 per cent of the total. The Labour vote, however, held up well here, with Baker's support falling by less than 2,000. Nevertheless the result must have been disappointing for Labour, given the progress the Party had made locally. The outcome was partly influenced by the absence of a Liberal candidate, although Labour had won here in 1924 in similar circumstances. More significant was the tariff argument in a constituency, which was dominated by the steel works.

## 8. WEST BROMWICH

Labour had held the remaining Black Country seats of West Bromwich, Wednesbury and Kingswinford since 1918 with the same MPs. An eve of poll article on the region in The Times reckoned that these seats were vulnerable. Labour was said to be losing the support of many of the unemployed, "enough to give the government victory". Meetings were being held "successfully in districts where they used to be broken up". Nevertheless the article pointed to the firmness of much of the Labour vote, "which is holding tenaciously to a party rather than to a creed and is angry that it should be found at a disadvantage".(247)

In West Bromwich there was still much local support for Frank Roberts, who had the stature of being Minister of Pensions in the previous Labour Government and a member of the NEC. He also had the advantage of the intervention of a Liberal candidate, W.Ramage. The Birmingham Post, however, reckoned that Roberts's local esteem was "personal rather than political", whilst his party had not "a single constructive proposal to meet the immediate exigencies of the country's crisis".(248) Nevertheless the West Bromwich Labour Party remained a formidable force. Party membership, for instance, having remained static at the minimum number of 180 throughout the 1920s, began rising to 240 in 1930 and 358 in 1931.(249) Also the local party was one of the few in the region to still retain a full time agent at the time of the Election.(250).

The West Bromwich Liberal Party had secured some successes in local government in recent years, but nothing in national elections. Ramage, their candidate, had been in the constituency for three years and sought unsuccessfully to claim the National ticket.(251) Although a committed Free Trader, he claimed a willingness to examine the tariff question "in the light of today's problems", but considered Free Trade "the best system for this country".(252)



Ramsey, the Conservative, who was a self made engineering manufacturer, warned the Labour Party that they would regret not being associated with the National Government.(253) Having published a study on Safeguarding, he proved a persuasive advocate of Tariff Reform. There were claims that he was being invited to speak in factories not by the employers but by the foremen and workers.(254) He also asserted that his nomination papers were signed by Liberals and that one prominent Liberal candidate had volunteered to speak for him.(255) The local press gave its support openly to Ramsey with the Midland Chronicle publishing a poster claiming that the Socialists threatened to take away savings, private houses and businesses. It also warned that Labour was “pledged to allow the foreigner to dump his cheap labour goods in this country and stop you from making them”. Finally there were warnings of what had happened in Russia, when the banks were taken over. The editorial in the same paper spoke of a choice between “financial security on the one side and bankruptcy and beggary on the other”.(256)

In these circumstances Roberts did well to hold on to his support, losing by only 525 votes. There was much jeering, shouting and singing of the Red Flag, when Ramsay tried to speak after the result. Roberts put his defeat down to the appeal of tariff reform, along with efforts by employers to put pressure on their workforces. He also blamed the apathy of some of his usual supporters. Finally he pointed to the “complicated” national situation, where many people were misled into believing that the members of the late Labour Government “had run away from MacDonald” and due to the “esteem” which the former Labour leader was still held in, voters preferred to vote for the candidate who supported him.(257)

## 9. WEDNESBURY

In Wednesbury the Labour MP, Short, was opposed by Lord Ednam, the son of the Earl of Dudley and chairman of the Round Oak Steel Works. Short concentrated his campaign on Free Trade and the cuts in benefits and wages. The Times commented on his popularity and progress through the constituency, borne “shoulder high” from meeting to meeting by his supporters “in a sort of wooden palanquin”.(258) The local Labour party had been even more successful than in West Bromwich in increasing individual membership. This had risen from the basic 180 in 1929 to 508 in 1930 and 461 in 1931.(259)

For this election, however, the Conservatives were very confident of success. Ednam was said to have “got into very close touch with the workers and has found them willing to listen everywhere, which is a triumph because it includes Tipton, reported to be the most extreme place in the Black Country”.(260) Ednam was even able to promise jobs, since foreign manufacturers were said to be making inquiries for sites in Wednesbury “in anticipation of increased safeguarding measures”.(261)

Not all Conservative meetings were peaceful, however. The Birmingham Gazette reported disruption at Tipton, where Labour supporters, crying ‘traitor’ and breaking into party song, disrupted Lord Londonderry’s speech after he referred to Ramsay MacDonald.(262) There was further uproar at another meeting, addressed by an ex-Labour councillor and the former Wednesbury Conservative candidate, H.G.Williams, which ended when the latter “jumped off the platform and elbowed his way among the crowd”.(263) Ednam showed that he had a populist touch, when at one meeting he scattered a bundle of worthless German banknotes, warning that the same would happen to the pound if the Labour Party were returned. One of his supporters, Duff Cooper, went further than most by saying that it would have been “better for Britain to have been beaten in the Great War, than for a Socialist majority to be returned at this election”.(264)

Short was defeated by over 4,000 votes, although his total vote was down by only 1,578. The absence of the 5,000 Liberal votes from 1929 was significant. Short put his defeat down to “the combination of unique circumstances associated with this so called national appeal, which... time will show it as false as it was dishonourable”.(265)

## 10. KINGSWINFORD

Kingswinford was another constituency with a high level of unemployment. At the time of the General Election those out of work totalled 10,000 in Cradley Heath and over 8,000 in Brierley Hill. Workers in these towns were affected by the slump in chainmaking, glassmaking and iron and steel.(266) There appears initially to have been an unsuccessful move by the Conservatives to invite the Labour MP, Charlie Sitch, to stand unopposed as a National candidate. This was a reflection of the support that Sitch, as MP and union official, had built up in the constituency.(267) It is not apparent what persuaded Sitch to stay on in the Labour Party.

This was to be another contest, which became centred on the question of tariffs. Sitch remained a firm supporter of Free Trade, claiming that the imposition of tariffs would not solve the unemployment



problem and would “inevitably result in lowering the all too low standard of living of the people”.(268) He pointed out that tariffs would make the importation of the raw materials for the glass industry difficult, as they made up 90 per cent of the total.(269) Moreover, he claimed that despite a safeguarding duty on enamelled hollowware the wages in that industry in his constituency had recently been cut by 10 per cent.(270) Sitch also strongly attacked the cuts in unemployment benefit, claiming that the unemployed were “the very last people who should have been asked to make a greater sacrifice”.(271)

The Conservative candidate, A.L.Stuart Todd, wanted “an immediate imposition of tariff duties on all imported goods”. In particular he pointed to the glass industry of Wordsley, which was once “a thriving community”, but now hit by cheap imports from Czechoslovakia.(272) The Birmingham Post too blamed “the unrestricted competition of the products of foreign furnaces, manned by cheap labour working long hours”.(273) Local employers were used to support this stand. The glassmaker S.M.Stuart, for instance, denied Sitch’s claim that the industry was vulnerable to retaliation over tariffs by pointing out that the most important ingredient in glass making was oxide of lead, which was made in this country. Also the senior director of the Round Oak steel works repeated his warning that the plant would close within three months of the return of a Labour Government.(274)

The Conservatives were helped by the withdrawal of the Liberal candidate and the support given them by that Party.(275) Sitch went down to defeat by 2,439 votes, which was Labour’s second closest result in the region. He put his defeat down to “the doctrines of fear”, preached by his opponents, especially over the value of the pound. He also pointed to the bitter attacks on the Labour Party by MacDonald, Thomas and especially Snowden.(276)

### C. CONCLUSIONS

Overall in the Black Country the Labour Party, including the ILA, secured 166,712 votes or 40.1 per cent of the total. The Conservatives, along with the National Liberals, secured 214,205 or 51.5 per cent and the Liberals 34,917 or 8.4 per cent. This compares with the 1929 figures for the three parties of 46, 33.5 and 20.5 per cent. Yet whereas in Birmingham Labour’s share of the vote was below the national average, in the Black Country Labour’s 40.1 per cent was well above the national 30.8 per cent. Indeed Labour’s total vote of 166,712 was only down by 11.5 per cent on its 1929 figure, compared with a national drop of 21 per cent.(277) This was a creditable performance, although not as good as in the

mining districts of South Wales. It was actually better than in Durham, which was a county singled out by Stevenson and Cook for the solidarity of the Labour vote in 1931.(278) Similarly in West Yorkshire the Labour vote dropped from 46 per cent of the total in 1929 to 32.5 per cent in 1931, which was not only a considerably bigger fall than in the Black Country but also more than the national drop from 37.1 per cent to 30.8 per cent.(279)

The Labour Party was affected in the Black Country as elsewhere by the National pact between the Conservatives and the Liberals, which meant that they fought only one opponent in seven of the ten seats. In those seats, where a third candidate in 1929 had now withdrawn, the Conservative / National vote rose by 63.3 per cent whilst the Labour vote fell by 10.2 per cent. Yet this compares favourably with a fall in similar such seats of 15.8 per cent in the West Riding of Yorkshire, 23.2 per cent in London and 27.2 per cent in West Lancashire. In the West Midlands as a whole the figure was 18.9 per cent.(280) The Times in its post-election summary of the results in the West Midlands as a whole, pointed out that there was “no mass drift from Labour” and that the Party “still remains strong and has been overborne either by the united anti-Socialist vote or by the emergence of a vote that is not usually cast at all.”(281)

One factor which probably contributed to the Labour vote holding up so well was that most of the Black Country seats were industrial rather than urban ones with close knit working-class communities.(282) Significantly the biggest swings against the party were in the two seats of Wolverhampton West and Smethwick, which were least typical of the area. Wolverhampton West was the one Black Country seat, which had an urban as well as an industrial element. Smethwick, on the other hand, was closest to Birmingham and more likely to be influenced by the case for tariff reform. Interestingly both of these seats were also severely affected by the disarray caused by the defection of Oswald Mosley. Elsewhere both the Mosley factor and tariff reform appear to have had less impact.

One factor, which does seem important in this General Election, is the importance, which candidates made of national issues to explain their result. The radio and sound newsreels were significant for the first time in this election, whilst the national press was rivalling the local one in importance. It can be argued that working-class communities, living in industrial areas, were likely to be less affected by the national media than those in urban areas, if only because their communities were more closely knit. The Times article, for instance, points out that “signs of a change of heart in the Labour electorate are



to be found chiefly in the big towns, where it has been comparatively easy to reach the voters and to set before them the facts of the fight. Birmingham is a noteworthy example of this change".(283)

A study of the municipal election results, which were held a few days after the General Election, gives a similar picture for Labour. Nationally the Party had 201 net losses with the Conservatives making a clean sweep in a number of boroughs, including Birmingham, but there were few changes in the Black Country.(284) The one borough, where the Conservatives did well with two gains, was again Smethwick, with Labour winning only one seat. In West Bromwich, where the Conservatives and the Liberals had an electoral pact, there were contests in six wards, with Labour retaining three seats and the Conservatives losing one to an Independent. The local press expressed its surprise, as they expected the Liberals to make at least one gain.(285) Labour did even better in Walsall, adding to their strength by winning four seats in new wards. One seat was lost in Wednesbury, whilst there were no elections in Wolverhampton or Dudley.

It seems, therefore, that although the Labour Party lost all of its parliamentary seats in the Black Country, there was no major loss of support during 1931. Indeed the party performed better here than in similar regions. MacDonald's decision to form a National Government and the nature of the campaign that followed did have an adverse effect on Labour's support. Nevertheless it seems that the national anti-Labour propaganda had less of an impact here. The party's losses were down more to the united front that Labour faced in the General Election than the desertion of working-class voters. A study of party membership figures for this period shows that, with the notable and understandable exception of Wolverhampton West, there was a considerable increase in members in 1931. Indeed the Annual Report shows numbers even higher in the 1933 Report, which covers membership for the year following the election.(286) Nevertheless the Labour Party did experience a serious reverse, leaving it without any MPs in the region for the first time since the 1918 General Election, but the test of the party's strength would be in the speed, with which it recovered from this position during the 1930s.

## FOOTNOTES

- 1 Stevenson, J. and Cook, C. (1994), p.113. Of the 59 Liberal seats 40 were won on minority votes, with the Conservatives generally in second place.

- 2 Many believed that the next election would bring a majority. The chairman of Glasgow Labour Party claimed that Labour would then win all the seats in that city. Thorpe, A. The British General Election of 1931 (1991), pp.9-10.
- 3 The NEC also wanted to introduce a new class of member called 'national affiliated members'. It was hoped that this would be a way of attracting more professional people into the party. Local parties successfully resisted, claiming that they would be "unaccountable and consequently untrustworthy". Riddell, N. (1999), pp.100-1.
- 4 Riddell, N. (1999), p.2
- 5 Ball, S. Baldwin and the Conservative Party. The Crisis of 1929-1931. (1988), pp.31-2.
- 6 Cook, C. 'Liberals, Labour and Local Elections' in The Politics of Reappraisal, 1918-1939 (1975), p.169.
- 7 Unemployment figures are those given in Butler, D. and Butler, G. (1994), pp.373-4. Also from Riddell, N. (1999), p.238. These figures are from the employment exchange registers. Slightly higher figures are given in Thorpe, A. (1991), pp.10-11 and Thorpe, A. (1997), p.69, but no source is given.
- 8 Mosley's decision to resign from the Cabinet annoyed some potential supporters, like Lansbury, who thought it would be better for him to fight his campaign from within the Cabinet. His decision to push for a vote at the PLP meeting lost him even more support as many felt he was being disloyal. Riddell, N. (1999), pp.153-4.
- 9 Town Crier, 25 April 1930.
- 10 Skidelsky, R. (1967), p.319. Skidelsky, R. (1975,) pp.204 -6.
- 11 McKibbin, R. 'The Economic Policy of the Labour Government 1929-31', Past and Present (1975), pp.95-123.
- 12 Mowat, C.L. (1955), pp.409-10.
- 13 Reynolds, J. and Laybourn, K. (1987), pp.98-100.
- 14 The four seats lost were:- West Fulham (May 1930), Shipley (November 1930), Sunderland (March 1931) and Ashton under Lyne (April 1931). The swing against Labour at Ashton was 8.3 per cent, which was followed by swings of 9.6 per cent at St Rollox (May 1931), 13.9 per cent at Gateshead and 11.1 per cent at Liverpool Wavertree (June 1931). Cook, C. (1980), p.90.



- 15 Neville Chamberlain's verdict, as Chairman of the Conservative Party, was "their complete failure to cope with the distress under which the country is now suffering", Cook, C. 'Liberals, Labour and Local Elections' in The Politics of Reappraisal, 1918-1939 (1975), p.172.
- 16 In particular they were disappointed by the failure to reform the Trade Disputes Act, implement the Washington Hours agreement for a maximum 48-hour week and introduce a 7-hour day in their Coal Mines Act. Riddell, N. (1999), pp.61-9.
- 17 Ibid., pp.58-9.
- 18 Thorpe, A. (1991), pp.19-21.
- 19 A number of local parties reported falling membership. Derby decided not to publish its figures for 1930. York had hoped to attain 3,000 members by the end of 1930, but only maintained its 2,000 figure of 1929. This dropped to 1,360 in 1931. There was a similar drop in Doncaster from 9,339 members in 1929 to 6,694 in 1931. Riddell, N. (1999), pp.120-1.
- 20 Ibid., pp.122-4. The figures for national membership were:- 1928 – 214,970, 1929 – 227,897, 1930 – 277,211, 1931 – 297,003, 1932 – 371,607. Riddell reckons that the true membership figure for 1930 from a sum of the total membership was 319,715, but this was not given at the 1931 Party Conference to give the impression of constantly increasing membership.
- 21 Thorpe, A. (1991), p.1. By August 1930 Baldwin had become converted to Neville Chamberlain's programme for an emergency tariff to protect manufactures, a quota system for wheat and a free hand to consider permanent tariffs. By March 1931, when Beaverbrook came to terms, the Conservatives were committed to protection of manufactures, imperial preference and quotas on food. Ibid., p.34. Baldwin also followed Chamberlain's call for cuts in public spending, especially on social services "until the country was in a position to afford it". Economy more than protection was "the issue of the hour" according to Thorpe. Ibid., p.40.
- 22 Those who signed the Mosley manifesto were:- O.Baldwin, J.Batey, A.Bevan, W.J.Brown, A.J.Cook (the miners' secretary), W.G.Cove, R.Forgan, J.Lovat-Fraser, J.F.Horrabin, S.F.Markham, J.McGovern, Lady Cynthia Mosley, Sir Oswald Mosley, H.T.Muggeridge, M.Philips Price, C.J.Simmons, E.J.Strachey.  
  
Skidelsky, R. (1967), p.312.
- 23 Ibid., p.305.
- 24 Thorpe, A. (1991), p.34.

- 25 Town Crier, 16 January 1931.
- 26 Skidelsky, R. (1975), p.244. It was the Birmingham Gazette, which leaked the news that Mosley was about to quit the Labour Party. Birmingham Gazette, 23 February 1931
- 27 Ibid., 25 February 1931.
- 28 Ibid., 27 February 1931.
- 29 Ibid., 2 March 1931.
- 30 Ibid., 26 February 1931.
- 31 The NEC resolved "that the action taken by Sir Oswald Mosley MP, in seeking to create a New Party, with organisation in opposition to the Divisional and Local Parties throughout the country and with parliamentary candidates in opposition to Labour members and Labour candidates in the constituencies, cannot be reconciled with membership of the Labour Party, under whose auspices he has been elected to parliament, whose constitution and Standing Orders he has undertaken to accept and whose interests he has been elected to the NEC to serve. In these circumstances the NEC consider that its duty is to inform the Smethwick Constituency Party that by this act of gross disloyalty its representative ceases under the Constitution to be a member of the Labour Party. The NEC further resolves that adhesion to the proposed New Party is incompatible with membership of the Labour Party and instructs the Secretary to communicate accordingly to the affiliated organisations and to the Members of the Parliamentary Party".  
NEC Minutes, 10 March 1931.
- 32 Foot, M. Aneurin Bevan (1962), p.114.
- 33 Skidelsky, R. (1975), p.244.
- 34 Thorpe, A. (1991), p.26.
- 35 Riddell, N. (1999), p.210.
- 36 Barker, R. 'Political Myth: Ramsay MacDonald and the Labour Party'. History 61: 1 (1976), p.51.
- 37 Stevenson, J. and Cook, C. (1994), pp.114-5. The Liberal Party was dividing into three sections. Lloyd George, who had temporarily removed himself from politics after an operation, opposed calling an election and his followers went into opposition. Samuel, the new leader, reluctantly agreed to the election, although 81 of the 113 Samuelite Liberal candidates were opposed by Conservatives. On the other hand the Simonite Liberals, who favoured closer ties with the Conservatives, were rarely opposed by a Conservative.



- 38 The Conservative manifesto called for “a carefully designed and adjusted tariff” to protect the home market and promote the reduction of existing tariffs against British goods. Meanwhile the Samuelite Liberals backed Free Trade, whilst the Simonite Liberals called for some application of tariffs. Thorpe, A. (1991), pp.156-7.
- 39 Ibid., pp.159-160.
- 40 NEC Report, 10 November 1931.
- 41 Ibid.
- 42 Mowat, C.L. (1955), pp.410.
- 43 NEC Report, 10 November 1931.
- 44 Thorpe, A. (1991), P211.
- 45 Ibid., p.218. Quoted from the Manchester Guardian, 28 October 1931.
- 46 Smart, N. The National Government (1999), p.32. On the other hand Cole claimed that “Snowden was more responsible than any other man for the immensity of the Labour defeat”. Cole, G.D.H. (1948), p.262.
- 47 W.A.Exon has no doubt of the impact of Tory scare stories on the Labour defeat in Smethwick. He quotes three such scares:- “They want your savings”, “There will be no money to pay unemployment benefit by the middle of November” and “The pound will drop to 2/- if the Socialists win”. Town Crier, 6 November 1931.
- 48 Mowat, C.L. (1955), p.410. The manifesto called for the nationalisation of power, transport, iron and steel, banking and credit. It also called for the repeal of the 1927 Trade Disputes Act.
- 49 Thorpe, A. (1991), p.161.
- 50 Stevenson, J. and Cook, C. (1980), pp.126-7.
- 51 Thorpe, A. (1991), p.267.
- 52 Birmingham Gazette, 3 November 1931, Cook, C. (1975), pp.172-3.
- 53 The figures for the new Birmingham Council, including aldermen, were:- Conservatives 72, Labour 36, Liberals 5, Independents 8. Birmingham Post, 2 November 1929.
- 54 The figures for the new Birmingham Council, including aldermen, were:- Conservatives 79, Labour 31, Liberals 5, Independents 6. Ibid., 3 November 1930.
- 55 The Town Crier pointed out that there was no decline in the total Labour vote, which was 58,234 in 1929 from 25 contests and 59,396 in 1930 from 26 contests. Town Crier, 7 November 1930.

- 56 Ibid., 25 April 1930.
- 57 Ibid., 6 February 1931.
- 58 Hastings, R.P. (1959), p.106.
- 59 Town Crier, 12 December 1930.
- 60 Birmingham Borough Labour Party Minutes, 29 December 1930 and 26 January 1930. Mosley was also removed from the list of potential speakers by Sheffield Brightside Labour Party. Riddell, N. (1999), p.118.
- 61 Town Crier, 6 March 1931.
- 62 The policy differences, over which Strachey and Young resigned, were youth organisation, police, unemployment insurance, India and the Soviet Union. Hastings, R.P. (1959), pp.107-8.
- 63 Riddell, N. (1999), p.21. The influence of Mosley on the Birmingham Labour Party was such that local children were reported in the streets chanting 'Oswald is merciful! Oswald will save us!'
- 64 Ibid., p.119.
- 65 Hastings, R.P. (1959), p.106.
- 66 Ibid., p.108.
- 67 Town Crier, 8 May 1931.
- 68 "The most remarkable feature of the evening was the fact that Sir Oswald received a fair hearing, secured largely by his own eloquence, at the Town Hall meeting, whereas when he came out to address an open-air overflow audience the crowd which awaited him in Chamberlain Square – the thousands who had been unable to gain admission – were distinctly unfriendly. He was unable to utter more than a dozen words at a time without interruption, and when one large section took up the singing of the 'Red Flag', opposed by a party rendering the national anthem, further speech became impossible and it was then that the bodyguard of police closed in, moving away the whole vast crowd towards New Street". Birmingham Gazette, 26 September 1931.
- 69 Hastings, R.P. (1959), p.108.
- 70 Labour Party Annual Report 1930, pp.135-6. For the full individual membership figures for Birmingham in 1929 see Appendices Table H.
- 71 Labour Party Annual Report 1931, p.139. For the full individual membership figures for Birmingham in 1930 see Appendices Table H.



- 72 Labour Party Annual Report 1932, p.141. For the full individual membership figures for Birmingham in 1931 see Appendices Table H.
- 73 Hopkins, E. (1990), p.305. Hill reckons that Birmingham's unemployment total for August 1931 would be increased to 90,047, if married women, who were not allowed to claim benefit, were included. Hill, B.K. (2002), p.141.
- 74 Briggs, A. History of Birmingham Volume 2 (1951), p.289.
- 75 The total Labour vote fell from 195,500 (41.8 per cent of the total) in 1929 to 126,702 (26.8 per cent of the total) in 1931. See Appendices Table D.
- 76 Hastings, R.P. (1959), p.156.
- 77 Rolfe, K.W.D. (1974), p.223.
- 78 Boughton, J. (1998).
- 79 The Times, 13 October 1931.
- 80 Birmingham Gazette, 19 October 1931.
- 81 J.Williams in Duddeston secured 1.1 per cent and E.J.Bartleet secured 1.0 per cent in Yardley. E.J.Strachey, who stood as an Independent in Aston, secured 10 per cent. See Appendices Table C.
- 82 The Times, 13 October 1931.
- 83 Hastings, R.P. (1959), p.156.
- 84 Birmingham Gazette, 28 October 1931.
- 85 The figures for the new Birmingham Council, with the old council in brackets and excluding aldermen, was:- Conservatives 70(61), Labour 15(20), Independents 4(4), Liberals 2(2). Ibid., 3 November 1931.
- 86 Hopkins, E. (1990), p.135.
- 87 Birmingham Gazette, 2 November 1929. See Appendices Table E.
- 88 Ede, J.F. History of Wednesbury (1962), p.384.
- 89 Wolverhampton Express and Star, 9 November 1929.
- 90 Town Crier, 7 November 1930.
- 91 Smethwick Telephone, 18 January 1930, 1 November 1930, Town Crier, 7 November 1930.
- 92 See Appendices Table E.
- 93 Wolverhampton Labour Party Minutes, Ward Committee Meeting 31 July 1930.
- 94 Ibid., Ward Committee Meeting 21 November 1930.

95 Town Crier 30 May 1930.

96 Ibid., 6 June 1930.

97 Ibid., 13 June 1930.

98 Birmingham Gazette, 9 June 1930.

99 Town Crier, 16 January 1931.

100 Skidelsky, R. (1967), p.244.

101 The reason for Mosley's non-attendance was because he had the flu. When this was announced one of the delegates asked, "Has Sir Oswald sent a doctor's note?" Birmingham Gazette, 26 February 1931.

102 Lawrence made the position clear to Mosley:- "As your president I told Sir Oswald that speaking also for the officers of the Council, if he saw fit to take up any other position, which was not allied to the national Labour Party, then neither I nor the officers or the members of the Trades and Labour Council would support him". Ibid., 26 February 1931.

103 The motion that Mosley was entitled to be heard came from G.F.Betts, who described the MP as "a man of courage and vision". Ibid., 26 February 1931.

104 Ibid.

105 W.A.Exon also wrote, "all through the meeting I was impressed by the loyalty of the delegates to the Labour Party. In doing what he has, without consulting either the Executive Committee or his constituents, he has aroused splendid enthusiasm for the movement. I will make bold to say that it is quite a different feeling to what Sir Oswald anticipated, and one that will spell disaster for him as far as Smethwick is concerned". Town Crier, 6 March 1931.

106 Birmingham Gazette, 5 March 1931.

107 Skidelsky, R. (1967), p.244.

108 The letter went on:-

"It is very obvious that the periodic convalescences of Sir Oswald Mosley MP at the Lido and the Cap d'Antibes were not spent learning the economics of Socialism and the discipline and self-abnegation of devotees to a cause.

It lies now with the Smethwick Trades and Labour Council to select a candidate, who has learnt these things and at the next election to retire this chameleon politician to the obscurity from which it helped to lift him".



Smethwick Telephone, 7 March 1931.

109 Baldwin concluded his letter:- “In a belief that the vast majority of my former supporters will agree that my attitude is not only in the best interests of the country but also the only conscientious one I could take up (remembering the policy upon which I was elected) I appeal for your support”.

Dudley Herald, 28 February 1931.

110 Birmingham Gazette, 27 February 1931

111 There were already reports that the mayor of Dudley, J.H.Molyneux, was expected to become the official Labour candidate. “During another recent dispute in the local Labour Party concerning Mr Baldwin’s votes his name was then suggested as a possible successor”. Wolverhampton Express and Star, 27 February 1931.

112 Dudley Herald, 21 March 1931.

113 Baldwin wrote:- “I should be pleased to contemplate resignation if you can show me any vote I have given in the House of Commons, which is contrary to my election pledge or can tell me the names of any previous Members of Parliament for Dudley for the last one hundred years, who have voted in the division lobbies as regularly and frequently as I have done.  
May I add that I consider it unfortunate that the Socialists of Dudley should show the country that they are more concerned with a party machine than they are with the principles of Socialism. Ibid., 28 March 1931.

114 Harold Chambers, the secretary of the Dudley Labour Party, told the paper:- “The question of his Socialistic beliefs or otherwise has never arisen, although we should now be justified in pointing out to him that his platform activities have been since associated with a party which does not claim to be Socialistic.

The advanced Socialistic section of the Labour Party, the leader of which, Mr Maxton appeared on behalf of Mr Baldwin in Dudley, has condemned wholeheartedly the policy of the Mosleyites.

Therefore the second part of Mr Baldwin’s letter is merely begging the question at issue.

The first part is irrelevant since no party could carry on the government on the expectation only of receiving support, and the resignation of Mr Baldwin from the Parliamentary Labour Party placed him and the Government whips in an impossible position, quite apart from his previous votes in the House.” Ibid., 28 March 1931.

115 Ibid., 17 October 1931.

- 116 Wolverhampton West Labour Party Minutes, Executive Committee Meeting, 19 January 1930.
- 117 Riddell, N. (1999), p.146.
- 118 Skidelsky R. (1967), p.303.
- 119 Brown, W.J. So Far (1943), p.157.
- 120 Riddell, N. (1999), p.160.
- 121 The points which most concerned the Executive Committee were the Mosley Memorandum, the ILP Parliamentary Group, the question of the 'pledge', the re-enactment of the Expiry Law, abstaining from voting and pledges given at previous Executive Committee meeting.
- Wolverhampton West Labour Party Minutes, Special Executive Committee Meeting, 13 January 1931.
- 122 Ibid., Executive Committee Meeting 18 January 1931.
- 123 In February a move to recommend a special meeting with Brown was withdrawn. Ibid., Local Party Meeting , 5 February 1931.
- 124 "Mr Jacob drew attention to the wards not raising their quota and to the need for each delegate to take a personal responsibility in the collection of individual members subscriptions in their wards".
- Ibid., Local Party Meeting, 5 February 1931, Executive Committee Meeting, 23 February 1931.
- 125 Brown had asked the group of 85 MPs for their assistance over the cut in the civil service bonus.
- Having left the meeting promising not to attack the party, he launched "an unwarranted attack on the government". Wolverhampton Express and Star, 13 February 1931.
- 126 Ibid., 19 February 1931.
- 127 Brown, W.J. (1943) pp.157-8.
- 128 Ibid., p.159.
- 129 Daily Mail, 12 March 1931.
- 130 Mosley, O. My Life (1968), p.283.
- 131 Wolverhampton Express and Star, 23 February 1931.
- 132 Wolverhampton Labour Party Minutes, Executive Committee Meeting, 23 February 1931.
- 133 Ibid., Executive Committee Meeting 26 February 1931.
- 134 Brown protested that "scores of thousands of civil servants were below the poverty line". He wanted cuts below £4 a week to be suspended until the Royal Commission had responded.
- Wolverhampton Express and Star, 26 February 1931.



135 Brown was speaking at a meeting of the Civil Service Clerical Association at the Albert Hall.

Birmingham Gazette, 28 February 1931.

136 Brown argued in his letter that the Government could have followed two lines of policy. One was to produce the policies that the party had stood for in opposition and challenge the opposing parties to throw them out. The other was to carry through the most radical policies, which the balance of parties could permit for a minority Government. Ibid., 6 March 1931.

137 Wolverhampton Express and Star, 5 March 1931.

138 Wolverhampton West Labour Party Minutes, Local Labour Party Meeting, 5 March 1931.

139 Wolverhampton Express and Star, 9 March 1931.

140 Wolverhampton West Labour Party Minutes, Special Executive Meeting, 25 March 1931.

141 Ibid., Local Labour Party Meeting 26 March 1931.

142 Wolverhampton Express and Star, 6 March 1931.

143 Wolverhampton West Labour Party Minutes, Local Labour Party Meeting, 7 May 1931.

144 Ibid., Local Labour Party Meeting, 2 April 1931 and Executive Committee Meeting, 30 April 1931.

145 Ibid., Executive Committee Meeting, 2 June 1931

146 Brown, W.J. (1943), p.185.

147 Wolverhampton West Labour Party Minutes, Local Labour Party Meeting, 4 June 1931.

148 Brown, W.J. (1943), p.186.

149 See Appendices Table G.

150 Wolverhampton West Labour Party Minutes, Local Labour Party Meeting, 4 June 1931.

151 Oldbury District Council Elections (2 candidates returned for each ward):-

Central

*R.M.Hadley (Independent)	634
*W.H.Briscoe (Independent)	516
W.H.Grice (Co-op)	<u>504</u>
No change	

Warley North

*G.N.Roberts (Labour)	857
H.A.Lacon (Labour)	811
A.R.Hands (Independent)	737
J.Seward (Independent)	<u>685</u>
1 Labour gain	

Warley South

J.Clarke (Labour)	510
H.A.Haigh (Labour)	510
*C.H.White (Independent)	505
*Mrs M.R.Grewcott (Independent)	<u>502</u>

## 2 Labour gains

Smethwick Telephone, 4 April 1931

### 152 Rowley Regis District Council Elections:-

<u>Blackheath</u>	1 Liberal gain from Independents.
<u>Rowley</u>	3 Labour gains.
<u>Tivdale</u>	No change.
<u>Cradley Heath</u>	2 Conservative and 1 Liberal gain from Labour.
<u>Old Hill</u>	1 Conservative and 1 Labour gain from Liberals and Independents.

### Tipton District Council Elections:-

Conservatives gained 2 seats in Dudley Port and 1 in Park, Burnt Tree and Ocker Hill.  
Independents gained 1 from Labour in Tipton Green, Horseley Heath and Toll End.

### Brierley Hill Council Elections

Labour lost 1 in the East but gained 2 in the West.

### Quarry Bank Council Elections

Liberals gained 2 from Labour and 1 from Conservatives.

Dudley Herald, 4 April 1931.

### 153 Smethwick Telephone, 25 April 1931

### 154 For membership figures see Appendices Table G.

### 155 Smethwick Telephone, 3 October 1931.

### 156 Town Crier, 24 April 1931.

157 Two other prospective candidates withdrew. One was R.Clements and the other was W.Hadgkiss, who was selected as the candidate for Dudley on the 13 June. Smethwick Telephone, 6 June 1931 and 13 June 1931. Lawrence was unanimously adopted in October with Willetts moving the adoption resolution and denying rumours of a rival Co-operative candidate. Town Crier, 23 October 1931.

158 "We owe MacDonald and Snowden a debt of gratitude for all they have done in the service of Socialism and Peace. In the time of the Great War they remained steadfast to their Socialist principles at great personal sacrifice. We can never forget that; not dare we call them 'traitors' now that they have taken a course, which they believe to be justified and we believe to be wrong. It has meant much to them to take that course in view of their positions in the Socialist movement. If only their courage had been even greater in this crisis they would not have chosen a path that leads to the wilderness. But let us give them credit for sincerity while we mourn their loss. There must be no bitterness in our strenuous opposition to their policy". Town Crier, 28 August 1931.



- 159 MacShane described the policy as “an attack on the working class”. Walsall Labour Party Minutes, Delegates Meeting, 3 September 1931.
- 160 Birmingham Post, 17 October 1931.
- 161 Town Crier, 16 October 1931.
- 162 Smethwick Telephone, 29 November 1930, 22 August 1931, 3 October 1931 and 17 October 1931.
- 163 Birmingham Post, 17 October 1931.
- 164 Birmingham Gazette, 22 October 1931.
- 165 Birmingham Post, 26 October 1931.
- 166 Birmingham Gazette, 27 October 1931.
- 167 Smethwick Telephone, 31 October 1931.
- 168 Exon also complained of the Conservative claim:- “The pound will drop to 2/- if the Socialists win”. He was also critical of their use of the ‘Country before Party’ stunt. Town Crier, 6 November 1931.
- 169 The members agreed to defer calling a special delegate’s conference for the selection of a new candidate, “in view of our financial position and the change in the national situation through the resignation of the Labour Government”. Wolverhampton Labour Party Minutes, Local Labour Party Meeting, 1 September 1931.
- 170 Wolverhampton West Labour Party Minutes, Executive Committee Meeting 9 October 1931. At a Special Delegates meeting the local party voted 36-1 in agreement with their Executive not to accept Brown’s terms “so long as he refuses to accept the standing orders laid down by the Parliamentary Labour Party”. They also voted 18-14 to leave the question of a Labour candidate to their Executive Committee. Ibid., Special Delegates Meeting, 11 October 1931.
- 171 Ibid., Executive Committee Meeting, 30 October 1931.
- 172 Wolverhampton Express and Star, 10 October 1931.
- 173 Ibid., 12 October 1931.
- 174 Birmingham Gazette, 15 October 1931.
- 175 Birmingham Post, 21 October 1931.

- 176 Bird suggested issuing certificates with exports as a license for importing goods of a similar classification and value. He said there was “no question of increases in taxation or of dearer food”. Ibid., 23 October 1931.
- 177 Birmingham Gazette, 14 October 1931.
- 178 Wolverhampton Express and Star, 23 October 1931, 24 October 1931.
- 179 Birmingham Post, 27 October 1931.
- 180 Brown, W.J. (1943), p.189.
- 181 Dudley Herald, 20 June 1931.
- 182 Ibid., 10 October 1931.
- 183 Ballard withdrew “on patriotic grounds and having regard to the crisis the country is passing through”. Ibid., 17 October 1931.
- 184 Wolverhampton Express and Star, 20 October 1931.
- 185 Dudley Herald, 10 October 1931.
- 186 Joel spoke of “giving raw materials and foodstuffs from Imperial sources a preference”. Ibid., 17 October 1931.
- 187 “Joel stands for tariffs, but due to Liberal support he has put tariffs aside as coming after the real question of national welfare”. Birmingham Post, 26 October 1931.
- 188 According to Joel “The Socialists have never been more than half hearted in their advocacy of Free Trade, and my opponent never has been a Free Trader as Liberals understand Free Trade”. Ibid., 26 October 1931.
- 189 Birmingham Gazette, 24 October 1931.
- 190 This happened at a meeting in Netherton. Birmingham Post, 23 October 1931. It was claimed though that the shouting down of Ballard by Labour supporters only encouraged more Liberals into Joel’s camp. Ibid., 24 October 1931.
- 191 Dudley Herald, 10 October 1931.
- 192 Birmingham Post, 23 October 1931.
- 193 Dudley Herald, 10 October 1931.
- 194 Baldwin’s letter to Joel:- “On the one side stands the Socialist Party which deserted in the hour of the nation’s crisis. It has since put forward a policy, which would destroy the value of the pound and bring catastrophe in its train. On the other hand stands the National Government, consisting of



men of all parties who have united to build up our trade, restore our financial stability and bring back better times to our country". Ibid., 24 October 1931.

195 Ibid., 24 October 1931.

196 Ibid., 17 October 1931.

197 Ibid., 24 October 1931.

198 Hadgkiss was carried shoulder high from his final meeting at the Dudley Opera House. Ibid., 31 October 1931.

199 See Appendices Table G.

200 Dean, K.G. (1975), p.129.

201 Walsall Observer, 4 April 1931.

202 Walsall Labour Party Minutes, Delegates Meeting, 17 October 1929.

203 Ibid., Delegates Meeting, 9 January 1930.

204 Ibid., AGM. 30 January 1930 and Adjourned AGM, 27 February 1930.

205 Ibid., Delegates Meeting, 16 June 1930.

206 Ibid., Delegates Meeting, 18 July 1930.

207 The full ward report for Bloxwich:- "W.Rowley reported that Bloxwich had met but the last few meetings not so well attended - but probably illness was the reason in several cases. He stressed the great assistance, financially, the Bloxwich Ward had given during the past year and he said the Bloxwich people were bearing a great part of the Party's financial burden. He said that Bloxwich Ward would always do their share and they would like to see some of the other wards doing better than Bloxwich did". Ibid., Ward Reports, 19 February 1931.

208 Ibid., Delegates Meeting, 2 April 1931.

209 McShane urged the delegates to pass a resolution denouncing a Means Test "Many members of our Party were middle class and did not understand the position of the workers as fully as should be desired. It was very unfortunate as it was putting many members in a false position and they were being treated as disloyal whereas their action was necessary if the soul of our movement was to be saved". Ibid., Delegates Meeting, 12 June 1930.

210 Ibid., AGM. 30 January 1931.

211 Birmingham Post, 23 October 1931.

- 212 This compared with 14s 6d for West Bromwich and 15s 3d for Birmingham. Dean, K.G. (1975), p.126.
- 213 The headings that Whitsun spoke under were:- Organisation, Finance, Newspaper, Indoor / Outdoor Meetings, Posters, Women's Meetings, Transport, Ward Organisation, Sick Votes, Polling Booth Committees.
- Walsall Labour Party Minutes, Special Delegates Meeting, 11 October 1931
- 214 McShane's Special, October 1931.
- 215 Birmingham Post, 23 October 1931.
- 216 The prospective Conservative was W.J.Talbot, a local candidate, stood down for Leckie, when the latter agreed to the following terms:- "I am in complete agreement with the manifesto of the Prime Minister. I would stand as a National candidate and vote for any policy brought in by the National Government. This must be made clear in the election address".
- Birmingham Gazette, 14 October 1931.
- 217 McShane's Special, October 1931.
- 218 Birmingham Gazette, 23 October 1931. Birmingham Post, 23 October 1931.
- 219 Dean, K.G. (1975), p.161.
- 220 Thorpe, A. (1991), p.205.
- 221 Dean, K.G. (1975), p.161. Press reports of rowdyism at Leckie's meetings included:- meetings "abandoned". Birmingham Gazette, 17 October 1931. "Leckie howled down". Ibid., 20 October 1931.
- 222 There were in fact 83 seats, where Labour increased its poll in the 1931 General Election, compared with the 408, where there was a decrease. Labour Party Annual Report 1932, P8.
- 223 McShane quoted a Walsall sub postmaster, who warned pensioners that the return of a Labour Government would mean that pensions would be worth nothing. Walsall Observer, 31 October 1931. Dean, K.G. (1975), p.161.
- 224 The General Council of the East Wolverhampton Conservative Association decided to oppose Mander because:- 1. Mander's previous support of the Labour Government. 2. The withdrawal of his early support of the National Government 2. Saying that he would support tariffs as a temporary expedient though a confirmed Free Trader. Wolverhampton Express and Star, 12 October 1931.



- 225 Ibid., 8 October 1931.
- 226 Birmingham Gazette, 16 October 1931.
- 227 Amery was leading a 'tariffs before Christmas' campaign. Ibid., 22 October 1931.
- 228 Birmingham Post, 21 October 1931.
- 229 Wolverhampton Express and Star, 23 October 1931.
- 230 The Times, 26 October 1931.
- 231 Wolverhampton Express and Star, 28 October 1931.
- 232 Birmingham Post, 27 October 1931. MacDonald had ruled that "the party in possession should have the right to claim the National candidature". The Conservatives claimed that they had won Stourbridge three times in the 1920s, whilst the Liberals occupied third place in the 1929 Election. Ibid., 20 October 1931.
- 233 Wellock claimed that the present crisis was a "Bankers' Crisis" caused by "a reckless loaning policy and brought to a head by the financial crisis in Germany". He also pointed out that "the distribution of our income is so unequal that people who need and have indeed produced goods cannot buy them... the world entire is overstocked with goods, while millions of people are suffering for want of them". Wilfred Wellock's Election Address.
- 234 Birmingham Post, 27 October 1931.
- 235 Birmingham Gazette, 26 October 1931.
- 236 Birmingham Post, 20 October 1931.
- 237 Birmingham Gazette, 26 October 1931.
- 238 Labour Party Annual Report 1932, P138.
- 239 Peto was a former MP and a parliamentary secretary in government. He was appointed on the advice of the earl of Dudley. Gardner, K.D. (1994), p.41.
- 240 Dudley Herald, 17 October 1931.
- 241 John Baker's Election Address.
- 242 Labour Party Annual Report 1931, p.137, Annual Report 1932, p.138.
- 243 The Liberal candidate in the 1929 General Election, Gilbert Salter, appeared on Peto's platform. Birmingham Post, 27 October 1931.
- 244 Wolverhampton Express and Star, 13 October 1931.
- 245 According to Gardner a full time agent was only appointed in 1933. Gardner, K.D. (1994), p.64.

- 246 Dudley Herald, 17 October 1931.
- 247 The Times, 26 October 1931.
- 248 Birmingham Post, 17 October 1931.
- 249 Labour Party Annual Report 1931, P137, Annual Report 1932, P138. See Appendices Table G.
- 250 There were four full-time Labour agents in the Black Country:- Guest in West Bromwich, Sam Hague in Bilston, Chambers in Dudley and Melson in Stourbridge. Labour Party Annual Report 1931, P281.
- 251 Ramage claimed that he was the first to declare himself as the National candidate. Birmingham Post, 17 October 1931.
- 252 Birmingham Gazette, 24 October 1931.
- 253 Ibid., 13 October 1931.
- 254 Ramsay was also described as “an able speaker, one who convinces the electors even those who disagree with him, of his sincerity. The Times, 26 October 1931.
- 255 Birmingham Post, 17 October 1931.
- 256 Midland Chronicle, 23 October 1931.
- 257 Ibid., 30 October 1931.
- 258 The Times, 26 October 1931.
- 259 Labour Party Annual Report 1930, P133-4, Annual Report 1931, P137, Annual Report 1932, P138. See Appendices Table G.
- 260 The Times, 26 October 1931.
- 261 Wolverhampton Express and Star, 21 October 1931.
- 262 “When Lord Londonderry, who was speaking in support of Lord Ednam, referred to Mr Ramsay MacDonald, the Prime Minister, there was a cry of ‘Traitor’ from the rear of the densely packed hall, followed by a general hubbub”. Birmingham Gazette, 17 October 1931.
- 263 The meeting in the market place in Wednesbury, was chaired by Fred Rotten, a former Labour councillor, who was “greeted with cat calls and jeers. He could not get a hearing at all. Mr H.G.Williams, who had contested Wednesbury previously, tried to speak. For a time he was unsuccessful and matters looked ugly when he jumped off the platform and elbowed his way among the crowd”. Ibid., 20 October 1931.
- 264 Wolverhampton Express and Star, 26 October 1931.



265 Ibid., 28 October 1931.

266 The chain and glassmaking industries were said to be “smothered to inactivity by the unrestricted competition of the products of foreign furnaces, manned by cheap labour working long hours.  
Birmingham Post, 19 October 1931.

267 Sitch revealed this information, which was verified by W. Harcourt Webb, president of the Divisional Conservative Association. Birmingham Gazette, 22 October 1931.

268 I stand wholeheartedly on the free trade platform, believing that the imposition of tariffs will never be any solution to the unemployment problem and that they will inevitably result in lowering the already low standard of living of the people”. Charles Sitch’s Election Address.

269 Sitch claimed that the glass industry was vulnerable to retaliation if tariffs were imposed, since many of the raw materials, such as silver sand, lead potash and saltpetre, were imported.  
Birmingham Gazette, 21 October 1931.

270 Sitch believed that the reason why industry was so depressed was “bad management”.  
Birmingham Post, 19 October 1931.

271 Charles Sitch’s Election Address.

272 Dudley Herald, 10 October 1931.

273 Birmingham Post, 19 October 1931.

274 Ibid., 23 October 1931.

275 Liberal support came once again from Alderman Ballard, the Dudley Liberal leader. Ibid., 19 October 1931.

276 Sitch said that Snowden “had been cruel to the party and had gone out of his way to say the bitterest things against some of the finest men who had ever been produced by the Labour movement”. Dudley Herald, 31 October 1931.

277 The total Labour vote was higher than any except 1929 and as a proportion of contested seats it was higher than in 1923. See Appendices Table B.

278 In Glamorgan the Labour vote was up to its 1929 level as it was in mining seats in Monmouthshire. The Labour vote in Durham in 1931 was 86.5 per cent of its 1929 level compared with the Black Country figure of 88.6 per cent. Stephenson, J. and Cook, C. (1994), P124 and Table A16, P314.

- 279 Reynolds, J. and Laybourn, K. (1987). pp.97-8. Elsewhere Laybourn puts the desertion of MacDonald and Snowden as significant in the loss of working-class support in West Yorkshire. Laybourn, K. (1988), p.91.
- 280 Regions with a lower drop in the Labour vote in such three to two seats were the North East with 5.1 per cent and the East Midlands with 8.2 per cent. Thorpe, A. (1991), pp.268-9.
- 281 The Times, 29 October 1931.
- 282 Stevenson and Cook point out that Labour retained three quarters of the mining seats where less than 10 per cent of the electorate was middle class, but only a fifth where over 10 per cent of the electorate was middle class. Stevenson, J. and Cook, C. (1980), p.126.
- 283 The Times, 29 October 1931.
- 284 See Appendices Table E.
- 285 Midland Chronicle, 7 November 1931.
- 286 Labour Party Annual Report 1932. p.138, Annual Report 1933. pp.119-22. See figures in Appendices Table G.



## CHAPTER 6 1932 – 1939

### A. NATIONAL DEVELOPMENTS

During the 1930s a deep division emerged across Britain between the Midlands and South on the one hand, where full employment had returned to many parts by 1935, and parts of the North, Wales and Scotland, which had not experienced the same economic recovery. Historians of the period have reflected this dichotomy. On the one side are the ‘pessimists’, who see the decade as one of wasted years, in which a self satisfied government failed to deal effectively with unemployment and its social consequences.(1) On the other side are those such as Stevenson and Cook, who have taken a more optimistic view, stressing the economic revival that came about with the expansion of new industries such as the motor car, artificial fibres and electric appliances.(2) Certainly historians are agreed that there was steady economic expansion between 1933 and 1937, partly stimulated by low interest rates and rising real wages following the big slump in prices in the early 1930s. This encouraged increased spending leading to the growth of the new industries as well as a recovery in house building. When the economic cycle ended it seemed that the economy would slip back into depression again in 1938. However the immediate pre-war years saw a revival in the staple industries, especially steel, due to the Government’s rearmament programme. It meant that the majority of the population saw a growth in real wages during the 1930s leading to an improvement in the quality of life, including advances in health and welfare.

The level of unemployment was a key factor. After the 1931 General Election the numbers rose so that by August 1932 the total was 3¾ million or 23 per cent of the insured workforce. Thereafter there was a slow but steady fall to 17.5 per cent at the end of 1933 and 9 per cent by late 1937, when the total was 1.4 million. How much this was due to government policy is unclear. There has, for instance, been some controversy amongst historians as to whether more could have been done by following a Keynesian policy of deficit spending.(3) Tariffs along with Imperial Preference were introduced in 1932, but their effects have also not been uncontroversial.(4)

For the Labour Party the 1930s have been described as “a decade of disappointment”.(5) After the 1931 defeat it seemed for a while that the Labour Party would swing to the left, as unemployment mounted.(6) In 1932 with the left claiming that capitalism was in its death throes, the ILP voted to disaffiliate from the Labour Party. They objected to the Labour Party’s insistence that they vote in the



same way as the PLP. The move did not have such a dramatic impact, since many of the MPs decided to stay within the party, forming the Socialist League under Stafford Cripps.

During the mid 1930s, as the economy improved, moderates, such as Herbert Morrison and Hugh Dalton, rose to prominence in the party seeking to make Labour more electable. Historians have described a Bevin, Citrine, Dalton block emerging at this time, which was to steer the party away from the left and towards a more realistic foreign policy.(7) The close links with the trade unions meant that the Party became more identified with the working class. Indeed Laybourn claims that in the mid 1930s “the trade union movement effectively became the dominant force in Labour politics”, which meant that “the Labour Party was truly, as it had never been before, the party of the working class”.(8) At the same time under Dalton and Morrison the party set about formulating a more precise electoral programme. In 1934 ‘For Socialism and Peace’ was published with its stress on the role of the State in planning for a Socialist society.(9) Meanwhile efforts by Cripps and the Socialist League to secure a more radical document, ‘Forward to Socialism’ were successfully resisted.(10).

Attempts were also being made to improve the party’s financial base. In 1932 the ‘Million New Members and Power’ campaign was launched, which resulted in an increase of nearly 80,000 members from 297,003 in 1931 to 371,607 in 1932.(11) Nevertheless during 1932 the party overspent by around £7,000. Its income of £38,000, of which £33,350 came from the trade unions, failed to match its expenditure of £45,000. Some constituencies were said to be in “desperate straits” with Transport House unable to give help for agents or by-elections.(12) This eventually led to the setting up a central By-Election Insurance Fund to help hard pressed constituencies put up candidates. Even this fund, however, was soon in debt as many District Labour Parties and smaller unions were unable to contribute.(13) Meanwhile Labour’s individual membership dipped to 366,023 in 1933, before making a modest rise to 381,259 in 1934 and a further rise to 419,311 in 1935.(14) In fact income for 1934 was £3,000 below that even of 1933, as union affiliation fees continued to slump with the Depression.(15) This affected Henderson’s General Election Fund, which was set up in 1934 to help weakly organised constituencies.(16)

Yet in the municipal elections between 1932-34 Labour made significant gains nation-wide, enabling the party to recover from the 1931 disaster. In 1932 there were only 15 net gains, but these were based on the 1929 results, which was Labour’s best year till then. There were bigger successes in 1933 with the Party making 176 net gains, winning power in Sheffield, Norwich, Leeds, Bootle, Swansea and



Barnsley. The 1934 results seem to have been the high-water mark of Labour's recovery in the 1930s. The party, fighting on the 1931 results, made 203 gains with only 8 losses and won control of the London County Council for the first time, along with Derby, Stoke, Hull and Burnley. The 1935 municipal elections, which were held only two weeks before the General Election, were to prove to be a foretaste of that result. Labour had a net loss of 24 seats, of which 15 were in the West Midlands. Herbert Morrison admitted that the results were "somewhat unexpected".(17)

There was a similar pattern in parliamentary by-elections with Labour capturing 10 seats between 1931–35. The average swing against the Government was 15.8 per cent. The Party's first by-election success was at Wakefield in April 1932, followed by Wednesbury in July. In 1933 there were further gains at Rotherham and East Fulham, where there was a 29.1 per cent swing. There were four successes in 1934, which has been described as probably Labour's "best year in the life of the National Government".(18) The Party gained two more seats during 1935, but there were disappointments, especially in Scotland, where the Labour vote was down on the 1929 level in Edinburgh West and Aberdeen South.(19) By this time the National Government was able to take credit for a revival in the economy and a housing boom, along with a popular Budget and the King's Jubilee celebrations. Labour was not seen at this stage as a viable alternative.(20)

The 1935 General Election was held at a difficult time for Labour. It coincided with the Italian invasion of Abyssinia, which had led to the imposition of League of Nation sanctions on Italy. In fact the crisis exposed Labour's own divisions. There was a feeling within the Party that in a growing war atmosphere Labour's pacifist views were not popular, which would lead to further electoral disappointments.(21) Lansbury, the Labour leader, defended the pacifist line at the Brighton Party Conference, where he was harshly attacked by Ernest Bevin.(22) The ensuing vote was comfortably won by Bevin, which was followed by Lansbury's resignation. His replacement, Clement Attlee, was generally considered to be a lightweight, temporary leader.(23) He supported collective security, but not the rearmament programme of the National Government. This enabled Baldwin to pose as the national leader, supporting the League of Nations and seeking a mandate for rearmament, whilst at the same time reassuringly promising "no great armaments".(24) Baldwin was also greatly assisted by the considerable amount of patriotism aroused by King George V's Jubilee celebrations, which he was able to exploit on behalf of the National Government.(25)



It was thought that foreign policy would prove to be the big issue in 1935, but how far it affected the result is difficult to assess. Mowat, for instance, believed that Baldwin succeeded because he had “stolen the clothes” of the Labour and Liberal Parties by his conversion to supporting the League.(26) Dalton, himself, later wrote that Baldwin’s enthusiasm for collective security through the League of Nations steadied the Liberal vote behind the National Government.(27) A.J.P.Taylor, on the other hand, thought that “the electors showed little interest in these questions... Housing, unemployment and the special areas were still the dominant themes”.(28) Stannage, in his study of the General Election, also puts the record of the National Government first, coupled with government claims that Labour would precipitate another financial collapse as in 1931.(29)

Although Baldwin started the campaign by stressing the National Government’s backing for the League of Nations, he soon concentrated on the economic achievements of the Government. Unemployment had dropped below 2 million in the autumn of 1935. Real wages had also increased during 1934 and 1935, whilst the salary cuts of 1931 were reversed. Moreover one million new homes had so far been built under the National Government. Although the Means Test still remained, the Government had responded to pressure earlier in the year not to impose national rates. The economic recovery was still far from complete, but it was sufficient for the government to appear competent, warning of increased taxation and a breakdown in confidence if Labour won. There were plenty of reminders of the 1931 collapse. Furthermore during the campaign the government announced money for road building and naval contracts to distressed areas. They also announced that the school leaving age would be raised to 15 and child allowance increased, which had both been Labour policies for some years.

The Labour Manifesto for the 1935 Election was based on the 1934 policy statement, For Socialism and Peace. Capitalism was attacked as the source of unemployment and of “four barren years”. Nationalisation figured widely, as did the setting up of a National Investment Board, but there was still no commitment to deficit financing. Labour promised to sweep away the Means Test and deal with the distressed areas with “a vigorous policy of national planning”.(30) On foreign policy the Party stressed its backing for the League of Nations and collective security, whilst continuing to work for multilateral disarmament.

According to Thorpe, Labour’s policies were seen by the voters as “too radical and class oriented at a time when the country was moving to prosperity under a competent if uninspiring government”.(31)



Stevenson and Cook believe that Labour failed to win the middle ground, frightening the electorate with “wild” proposals such as nationalising the banks.(32) Indeed the right-wing of the party attacked “the silly propaganda” of the Socialist League, which had been founded by Cripps. The party’s lack of effective leadership, especially when compared with Baldwin’s appeal, was also seen as decisive.(33) Stevenson and Cook have stressed the plight of Labour constituencies. As there had been only a modest increase in membership organisation remained inadequate, with the number of full time agents down 20 per cent on 1929 and even down on 1924.(34)

Labour had hoped to win between 200-240 seats in the General Election.(35) In fact they won only 154, but they could console themselves by claiming 38 per cent of the vote, which was their highest to that point, including the 1929 Election. The swing to Labour from 1931 was 9.4 per cent, whilst at 8.3 million the total vote was similar to that of 1929. The absence of Liberal intervention, however, meant that fewer seats were held. Labour did well in London, thanks to the organisational efforts of Herbert Morrison, gaining 17 seats to return 22 MPs. Elsewhere their best results included the cities of Stoke and Sheffield, where they won over half the vote and in West Yorkshire, where 10 of the 23 seats were won. On the other hand the Labour Party’s performance in Lancashire was disappointing, winning only 3 seats in Manchester, one in Liverpool but none in Salford, Bolton, Oldham, Preston or Stockport. Labour also did badly in the North East towns, including Newcastle and Sunderland.

Following the disappointment of the 1935 General Election further efforts were made within Labour to make the party more electable. Herbert Morrison claimed that the British people were “not going to vote in a hurry for a first class financial crisis”. He claimed that the party’s base was too narrow to appeal to former Liberal voters, who had supported the National Government since 1931.(36) The following years saw efforts by Dalton, backed by Ernest Bevin, to formulate a more viable economic policy for the party and then to persuade Labour to support rearmament. The Socialist League, on the other hand, wanted to involve Labour in anti-Fascist pacts with the ILP and the Communist Party. This was successfully resisted by the party leadership, which eventually came out in opposition to the government’s appeasement policy. When Cripps and Aneurin Bevan called for support for the Spanish Republic and the establishment of a Popular Front early in 1939, both were expelled from the party.(37)

Meanwhile Labour’s Immediate Programme, published in 1937, gave concrete proposals of what a majority Labour Government would do. These included the establishment of a national investment



board, the nationalisation of the Bank of England, the coal industry, power and transport. Also the Means Test would be abolished, the school-leaving age raised and a 40-hour week with paid holidays was proposed. A Constituency Parties movement developed in 1937 as a counter to the power of the trade unions. Their main achievement was to increase their representation on the NEC from 5 to 7, whilst excluding unions from the election of their representatives.

The general impression of Stevenson and Cook during these years was that there was no major swing to Labour with the two main Parties remaining on "a fairly even keel".(38) In by-elections between 1935-39 Labour made 13 gains but most were seats won by the party in 1929. The swing to Labour in these seats was 7 per cent, but the overall swing in by-elections between 1935-9 was only 3.9 per cent. Moreover Labour failed to win 5 seats, which they had held in 1929.(39) In municipal elections Labour did less well, suffering net losses in each of the years. In 1936 as many as 81 seats were lost, based on the 1933 results. In 1937 there were 5 net losses, although Labour did make sweeping gains in London and also took control of Coventry for the first time. In the 1938 elections the Conservatives made a net gain of 30 seats, whilst Labour lost control of Burnley, Bristol, Hull and Sunderland. One factor, which partly explains this poor performance, was the relentless decline of the Liberal Party, which won 1 in 7 seats in 1931, 1 in 10 in 1935 but only 1 in 13 in 1938.(40)

At a meeting of the Campaign Committee of the NEC on 18 November 1938, the results were described in some quarters "as deplorable and would have been worse but for the special national effort". It was felt that the election results reflected concern over the international crisis, as they were held soon after the Munich Conference. Nevertheless it was pointed out that since 1934 Labour had been "at a standstill outside London" and held only a third of the seats in County Boroughs and a sixth of those in non County Boroughs. The Committee comforted itself by claiming that municipal elections did not provide "an accurate guide to the strength of political parties or to the state of political opinion in relation to national politics. Since municipal elections are not fought on 'strict party lines' over wide areas of the country, it is only possible to gather a general trend of opinion".(41) One important consideration in the immediate pre-war years was the growing importance of the situation in Europe. The threat of an oncoming war made the appeal of the National Government more powerful, even though by this time it was essentially a Conservative Government.

Yet there were exceptions to these disappointments. Reynolds and Laybourn, for instance, have noted rising membership in the Halifax and Leeds Constituency Parties at this time. There were also



two by-election successes here in 1939.(42) Labour representation on Town Councils peaked in West Yorkshire in 1936 at 20 per cent above the 1930 figure.(43) Reynolds and Laybourn conclude that by the end of this period despite the strength of the National Government and anti-Socialist alliances in local government, Labour was “the most important single parliamentary party in West Yorkshire”.(44)

Thorpe has also detected a similar revival of Labour’s fortunes in Derby during the decade.(45) Labour had lost both of their parliamentary seats here in 1931, along with control of the borough council. This was regained, however, in 1934, whilst one of the parliamentary seats was recaptured in 1935. Thorpe gives three major reasons for Labour’s strength here. Firstly Derby had three main sources of employment, the railways, Rolls Royce and British Celanese, which were all strongly unionised. This gave the local Labour Party strong financial support and responsible leadership.(46) Secondly Derby had a large Co-operative Movement, which was Labour’s largest affiliate.(47) Thirdly Derby had a powerful Nonconformist tradition, which had shifted its support from the Liberals to Labour. Thorpe also stresses Labour’s municipal record when in power after 1928:- “moderate responsible leadership working, unlike the party’s national leaders, to well defined strategies in improving housing, educational facilities and the condition of the town generally”. According to Thorpe it had been “only Labour’s perceived incompetence at national level that brought the Conservatives back”.(48)

The state of the Labour Party in 1939 is, therefore, open to some controversy. Laybourn, for instance, gives some support for the views of Henry Pelling in believing that Labour might have won an election, called before the outbreak of war, “especially given the performance of the National Government in foreign affairs”.(49) The conclusion of most historians, however, is that had there been a General Election in 1939, Labour would not have won it.(50) Stevenson and Cook believe that after three by-election victories in the spring of 1938, “the tide of Labour’s popularity seems definitely to have waned”.(51) Thorpe claims that on the evidence of Labour’s poor electoral record, the party would have faced a defeat as bad as in 1935.(52) He concludes, in his study of the 1930s, that the Labour Party was still seen by many as “the party of depression and governmental incompetence”, which had proved itself “unfit to govern”. His most optimistic view of the decade has been to see it as a time of “limited revival and consolidation” with the organisation holding good, and with membership and trade union affiliation rising. Even so the party was still seen by many as representing primarily the trade unions and the unemployed. (53) The National Government and Conservative Party, on the other



hand, were able to retain widespread support “even among sections of the unemployed and more generally within the working class”. This, he claims, was because they provided “a degree of stability and prosperity which benefited all classes, though not all to the same degree”.(54)

## B. REGIONAL DEVELOPMENTS

### 1. THE LABOUR PARTY IN BIRMINGHAM

The 1930s have been described as a “dismal decade” for the Birmingham Labour Party.(55) Even in municipal elections between 1932-35, when nationally Labour was making a recovery, the Party was not performing well in the city. Then in the 1935 General Election Birmingham recorded one of the lowest swings in the country and again failed to elect a single Labour MP.(56) In the succeeding years Labour failed to win three by-elections, whilst continuing to lose seats on the Town Council.

Yet the period seemed to start well for Labour in the 1932 municipal elections. By concentrating their attack on the Means Test, three seats were gained, based on those held in 1929. Labour was reported to be “disappointed” with the result, as it meant that the Party held only 18 seats on the Council compared with 67 for the Conservatives.(57) In 1933 Labour won two seats in the new ward of Perry Barr, but made only one other gain.(58) Labour was further disappointed by its results in 1934. Nine seats had been lost in the 1931 municipal elections, although one was recaptured in a by-election. Labour won seven of the other eight seats but optimists were said to be hoping for ten or twelve gains. The Birmingham Post claimed that the result was “a vote of confidence” in the existing Council, which had built 40,000 new houses and provided public services of “high efficiency”.(59)

The 1935 municipal results added to the disappointment of the local Labour Party, which lost seven seats to the Conservatives in an election held only two weeks before the General Election.(60) Labour concentrated their attack on the inadequate health, housing and education conditions in the city. The Birmingham Post, however, described the Labour candidates as “not impressive” and their programme as having “little to say for itself”. The party also had to contend with the opposition’s political machine operating in a high gear ready for the General Election.(61)

A similar disappointing pattern can be seen in the numbers of individual members in the constituency Labour Parties of Birmingham at this time. From its 1931 total of 5,603 the number rose at first to 7,930 in 1932, partly due to the national membership drive. The total then dropped to 7,277 in 1933 and 6,464 in 1934, before making a modest rise to 6,849 in 1935. Nationally too there had been a



dip in membership in 1933, but thereafter the total rose each year. The Birmingham figures do contain considerable disparities amongst the constituencies. The most successful one remained Kings Norton, situated in the outer suburbs of the city, where numbers rose from 936 in 1931 to 1,284 in 1932 and reached 1,587 in 1935. On the other hand constituencies in the inner ring of Birmingham generally showed a decline in numbers. Deritend, for instance, did increase its membership from 280 in 1931 to 470 in 1932, but the total dropped back to 276 by 1935. Both Ladywood and West Birmingham also had big rises for 1932, reaching 850 and 1,054 respectively, before dropping to 456 and 793 in 1935. On the other hand the Duddeston total remained around 240 throughout these years. Of the middle-class suburbs Edgbaston declined from 490 in 1931 to 240 in 1935, whilst Moseley rose from 667 in 1931 to 1,052 in 1932 before dropping back to 784 in 1935.<sup>(62)</sup> The conclusion from these figures is that Labour lost its support in the inner wards, which it had captured in 1929, but retained it in the outer suburbs with their new council estates.

Labour's performance in Birmingham in the 1935 General Election was predictably disappointing. The swing to the party was a modest 7 per cent, compared with 10.5 per cent in Manchester, 11.4 per cent in Liverpool and 12.9 per cent in London.<sup>(63)</sup> Moreover Labour was starting from a much lower base in Birmingham. The Party, which had secured only 126,702 votes or 26.8 per cent of the total in 1931, could raise this to just 140,293 or 33.8 per cent in 1935. This compares unfavourably with the 195,500 or 41.8 per cent, which was achieved in 1929. Indeed in six constituencies the total Labour vote was below that of 1931, although, due to a lower poll, their percentage of the total vote was higher.<sup>(64)</sup> Moreover, unlike the position noted by Laybourn in West Yorkshire, there was no significant Liberal vote here to move to the Conservatives during the 1930s.<sup>(65)</sup> Indeed in the Midlands as a whole Labour did badly, winning only 11 seats in 1935 compared with 35 in 1929.

A major problem for Labour in Birmingham was that with the middle ground held traditionally by the Conservatives, Labour tended to move to the left. Hastings claims that foreign affairs dominated the 1935 General Election to Labour's disadvantage. Not only was the local party divided on rearmament but also 9 of their 12 candidates for the election came from its pacifist wing. The National Government meanwhile pointed out the benefits to the city's economy of their tariff policies along with rearmament, claiming that they would bring greater prosperity and jobs. Meanwhile Labour's posters showing children in gas masks were seen as election scares.<sup>(66)</sup>

Stevenson and Cook have also pointed to the lack of organisation in the Birmingham constituencies, which they describe as “hopelessly ill-equipped financially to fight the election”.(67) Another factor was the turn-out, which fell by 10.5 per cent in Birmingham to 62.8 per cent, compared with a national drop of 5 per cent to 71 per cent. This was a significant fall, reflecting the heavy rain that fell during the afternoon and evening as well as working-class apathy.(68).

The reasons for this apathy could be connected to Birmingham’s relative prosperity during the 1930s, which brought a certain contentment with the National Government amongst the working class. Asa Briggs dates the improvement in Birmingham’s economy from September 1931. By the spring of 1933 the city had the lowest unemployment figures since July 1930. Indeed there were reports of labour shortages in certain skilled trades, so that between 1934-37 there was a marked movement of labour into the city.(69) Unemployment in September 1935 was 21,645, which was just 5.9 per cent, compared with a national rate of 15.3 per cent.(70) The Birmingham Post claimed that the General Election result reflected the National Government’s record of economic recovery over the previous four years and the unrealistic programme that Labour fought under.(71)

The position did not improve for Labour between 1936-39, when the party failed to win three by-elections at Erdington in October 1936, Birmingham West in April 1937 and Aston in May 1939. Indeed there were only slight reductions in the Conservative majorities.(72) The main question at Erdington appeared to be the “peace issue” with the Labour candidate, Jim Simmons, losing on account of his pacifist stand.(73) He was accused of being prepared to leave the British people “in the same position as the Abyssinians and exposed to the same terrible fate that they suffered”.(74) The Conservatives used the slogan ‘Peace and Prosperity’, exploiting the fact that the Government’s rearmament programme was helping to keep down unemployment in the city.(75)

Richard Crossman, the loser at Birmingham West, claimed that he had the support of the artisans and their wives in the west end of the constituency, but “in the courts and back to back houses I had two enemies to fight – grinding poverty, which has caused many to accept the crumbs from the rich man’s table and fear of the possible consequences of ‘breaking faith’ with the traditional masters”.(76) The Town Crier put the blame for Labour’s defeat on the inequalities in the voting system, which allowed “5,000 Tory outvoters ... possessing property qualifications from as far away as Bournemouth and the Isle of Wight”.(77)



The final by-election to be held in the city before the war proved to be something of an anti-climax. Despite the country heading for war and the presence of some 1,000 canvassers, voter apathy reigned in Aston, where the standard comment was that "people just don't seem interested".(78) The Labour Party, helped by the Town Crier, tried to make the government's conscription policy an issue. Dr S.Segal, the Labour candidate, announced that "unless there is conscription of wealth, I cannot give support to the Government's proposals concerning the conscription of life".(79) The Birmingham Gazette, on the other hand, declared that conscription aroused "few queries" and most of those were concerned with personal rather than general problems.(80)

In the end, on a poll of only 44.2 per cent there was a swing to Labour of 2.5 per cent, but Major Kellett had a comfortable majority of over 5,000. He praised women voters in particular for backing the National Government on the issue of "peace and conscription".(81) Dr Segal declared that the Chamberlain tradition was "being smashed". "Many Aston electors", he claimed "clinging to the Chamberlain tradition for years, started realising the danger of Tory government for the first time. But the Tories poured all their resources into the fight. What they lacked in policy, they made up in money and organisation".(82) The Birmingham Gazette praised the way that Labour had built up their election machine, crediting the agent, W.F.Shepherd, with refurbishing and extending their organisation.(83)

There were similar disappointments in the municipal elections. In 1936 the Birmingham Gazette warned that with many factories working overtime, "large numbers of people will find it very inconvenient if not impossible to vote before 8 PM". The Labour message was reported to be that since the city was a wealthy one it could afford to provide more in the way of social services. Yet Arthur Greenwood was said to have commended local government in Birmingham.(84) Indeed after the results, which saw a further net loss of two seats by Labour, the Birmingham Gazette admitted that "the Conservatives on the City Council are on the whole a progressive rather than a reactionary body".(85) The Town Crier, on the other hand, warned that "we are allowing the Tories to live on that long since dead tradition of radicalism". The Labour defeat was put down to "lack of drive and militancy of policy and because our organisation is bad".(86)

In 1937 there were 3 more losses for Labour, leaving them with only 27 seats on the Council, which represented a loss of twelve seats in three years. Yet in nearby Coventry, which was experiencing similar economic growth to Birmingham, Labour gained three seats to take control of the Council. The



Birmingham Post put the Unionist success in the city down to “a record of progressive administration altogether too conspicuous to be forgotten or seriously disputed”.(87)

Soon after these elections the Town Crier singled out five reasons for Labour’s poor showing during the 1930s. The first was thought to be organisation, as there was said to be a lack of workers and support. The quality of candidates was also questioned, with a call for the payment of members to attract the right calibre. There was a call for more women candidates. Party propaganda was also criticised, with one member claiming that the writers knew more about Spain than Birmingham. Finally there was an admission that the local party needed “a clear cut municipal policy, which will deal with ‘brass tacks’ rather than vague generalities”.(88)

The 1938 municipal results were to prove another disaster for Labour with the Conservatives taking a further five seats from them, winning 23 of the 27 wards. This was the fourth successive year that they had added to their strength on the City Council, whilst Labour retained only 4 of their 9 seats. The Town Crier thought that the Conservative victory was partly due to their greater financial resources, whilst also admitting that their organisation “had proved superior to our own”.(89) The Birmingham Post, on the other hand, claimed that the results reflected “satisfaction with the policy of the City Council” and “the continued failure of Socialist propaganda”.(90)

Party membership in Birmingham shows a similar trend during this period. After a slight increase to 7,002 on 1936, numbers dropped again to 6,342 in 1937, 6,298 in 1938 and 6,665 in 1939. Nationally party membership stood at 408,804 on the eve of the war, which was only slightly down on the 1935 figure of 419,311. Once again Kings Norton was the notable exception to this pattern. Numbers here rose to 1,699 in 1936, 1,808 in 1937, 1,709 in 1938 and 1,734 in 1939. Another outer suburb constituency, Yardley, having dropped their numbers in the early 1930s, showed a big revival by rising from 579 in 1936 to 1,174 in 1939. Yardley was also the only Birmingham constituency to maintain a full-time agent on the eve of the war. At the other extreme Aston, Deritend and Duddeston consistently returned the minimum membership of 240 during these years.(91)

In contrast to the situation in the constituencies Hastings has noted increased union militancy during the late 1930s.(92) Trade union membership rose as the rearmament boom got under way. The AEU, for instance, more than doubled its Birmingham membership between 1935 and 1939. Union links with the Labour Party were said to be closer, whilst there were even successful strikes during 1938, with workers securing wage increases and paid holidays.(93) This was part of a national trend, which saw



the number of affiliated trade unionists reached 2.21 million in 1939, which was the highest total since the 3.24 million of 1927.(94) None of this, however, appears to have brought any electoral success to the local Labour Party.

Hastings has noted that the decade ended with the Birmingham Labour Party returning to a more radical stand. There was, for instance, a good deal of support for the Spanish Republic on the outbreak of civil war there. This was reflected in calls for support for a Popular Front here and the setting up of all-party Spanish democratic aid committees. In 1937 Chamberlain's policy of appeasement came under attack with the Birmingham Council of Labour organising a 'Chamberlain must Go' campaign.(95)

Then in May 1938 the Birmingham Borough Labour Party took a controversial stand with its decision, motivated by its support for the Spanish Republic, to support the formation of a Council of Action. It called for support from "every Peace and Democratic organisation in the city", which included amongst others the Liberal Party, the Birmingham Council of Labour and the Communist Party.(96) Since this went against Labour Party policy, the Birmingham Trades Council complained to the NEC.(97) The result was a letter from the National Agent, Shepherd, threatening disaffiliation if connections were made with other political bodies. This in turn provoked much opposition to the NEC.(98)

Such opposition was further aroused in February 1939 when delegates voted 44-26 in opposition to the expulsion of Stafford Cripps over his support for a Popular Front. Delegates wanted local constituency parties to decide whether at the next General Election to run a Labour candidate, who might split the anti-Government vote. They urged the calling of a special conference to discuss the matter.(99)

Although the Birmingham Labour Party was far from unanimous in its stand on these matters, the position taken by the majority shows that the left still predominated. Such activity, however, appears to have gained the Party little local support. There is little evidence to suggest that Birmingham at this time was anything other than a stronghold of Unionism. There is a suggestion of a change, however, with Labour's support for the Rent Strike of 1939. This was a campaign involving 10,000 tenants, who were opposed to differential rents on municipal housing estates. According to Hastings it led to many of them identifying for the first time with Labour, making these estates Labour strongholds in the post-war period.(100)

the number of affiliated trade unionists reached 2.21 million in 1939, which was the highest total since the 3.24 million of 1927.(94) None of this, however, appears to have brought any electoral success to the local Labour Party.

Hastings has noted that the decade ended with the Birmingham Labour Party returning to a more radical stand. There was, for instance, a good deal of support for the Spanish Republic on the outbreak of civil war there. This was reflected in calls for support for a Popular Front here and the setting up of all-party Spanish democratic aid committees. In 1937 Chamberlain's policy of appeasement came under attack with the Birmingham Council of Labour organising a 'Chamberlain must Go' campaign.(95)

Then in May 1938 the Birmingham Borough Labour Party took a controversial stand with its decision, motivated by its support for the Spanish Republic, to support the formation of a Council of Action. It called for support from "every Peace and Democratic organisation in the city", which included amongst others the Liberal Party, the Birmingham Council of Labour and the Communist Party.(96) Since this went against Labour Party policy, the Birmingham Trades Council complained to the NEC.(97) The result was a letter from the National Agent, Shepherd, threatening disaffiliation if connections were made with other political bodies. This in turn provoked much opposition to the NEC.(98)

Such opposition was further aroused in February 1939 when delegates voted 44-26 in opposition to the expulsion of Stafford Cripps over his support for a Popular Front. Delegates wanted local constituency parties to decide whether at the next General Election to run a Labour candidate, who might split the anti-Government vote. They urged the calling of a special conference to discuss the matter.(99)

Although the Birmingham Labour Party was far from unanimous in its stand on these matters, the position taken by the majority shows that the left still predominated. Such activity, however, appears to have gained the Party little local support. There is little evidence to suggest that Birmingham at this time was anything other than a stronghold of Unionism. There is a suggestion of a change, however, with Labour's support for the Rent Strike of 1939. This was a campaign involving 10,000 tenants, who were opposed to differential rents on municipal housing estates. According to Hastings it led to many of them identifying for the first time with Labour, making these estates Labour strongholds in the post-war period.(100)



## 2. THE LABOUR PARTY IN THE BLACK COUNTRY

### A. THE STATE OF LOCAL PARTIES 1932-35

The first important test for Labour in the Black Country during this period was to be the Wednesbury by-election in July 1932, which followed the elevation of Lord Ednam to the Earldom of Dudley on the death of his father. A report in The Times predicted a Labour victory, especially given the character of the constituency. A picture was painted of "little houses and little shops, encircled by gaunt factory chimneys... a haze of smoke over the surrounding country. Many could wish that the smoke were denser and more general, for that might mean returning prosperity".(101)

The Labour candidate was John Bandfield, who was the secretary of the National Union of Operative Bakers and Confectioners. With 12,000 unemployed in the constituency, he concentrated on the Means Test as the main issue.(102) He also campaigned as a Free Trader, hoping to pick up Liberal votes and exploit the apparent failure of Protection in the constituency, where the iron and steel industry was showing no sign of an upturn.(103) He was well supported by Labour MPs, including the new leader, George Lansbury, and Arthur Greenwood, who accused the National Government of deliberately seeking to reduce the standard of living of the working class.(104) Labour was also helped by the admission in the press that the Party had "overhauled and tightened up" the local organisation.(105)

Initially it appears that there was an attempt to impose a National Labour candidate on the constituency, but this was successfully resisted by the local Conservative organisation.(106) Instead they selected Captain Rex Davies, whose slogan was "British trade for British hands". He put most emphasis on "economy, employment and Empire", whilst trying to put responsibility for the Means Test on the former Labour Government.(107) Davies was well supported by Liberals, including the 1929 candidate, John Stockdale, but his meetings were met with rowdy receptions and several were broken up.(108)

The result was a Labour victory by 3,799, which was a swing of 9.2 per cent, representing around 8,000 votes, on the 1931 General Election. Bandfield put his success down to resentment over the Means Test and the apparent failure of tariffs to lift local industries. Davies blamed apathy for his defeat along with what he called "the fraudulent prospectus regarding the Means Test".(109) Nationally the result was to be Labour's second by-election success of the Parliament out of nine attempts.

Labour also did well in the municipal elections held in November 1932, where the candidates who had won in the successful year of 1929 were up for re-election. In Smethwick, for instance, the local

party won six of the eight wards, making one gain. Elsewhere Labour won seven of the ten contested seats in Dudley, making two gains, whilst in Walsall they won four out of five, making one gain.(110) The elections were held at a time of high unemployment with Labour stressing the iniquities of the Means Test. Feelings on this issue were certainly high, as was the case in Oldbury where six councillors had walked out in protest, moving that the local council should abolish the Means Test and pay unemployment benefit for “as long as a worker could not find employment”.(111)

Meanwhile in Wolverhampton the Labour Party remained in such financial difficulty that each ward was instructed not to exceed £15 in election expenses.(112) Further disarray was caused by the emergence of the Independent Labour Association, which made its first appearance in local elections and gained two seats. William Lawley, who was Brown’s election agent, was the major force behind the setting up of the ILA. He captured the St Matthew’s Ward from Labour, whilst their other success was at the expense of the Liberals in St James’s Ward. Furthermore their presence in the Blakenhall and St John’s Ward was enough to push Labour into third place.(113)

In the municipal elections of 1933 the Labour Party was more successful in the Black Country than in Birmingham. Two seats were gained in Smethwick and one in each of Dudley, Wednesbury, West Bromwich and Walsall. Yet there were disappointments as in Bilston, which was holding its first elections as a municipal borough. Here Labour, despite having a thriving local party organisation, secured only two of the fifteen seats.(114)

In Wolverhampton the Labour Party remained openly divided. In the 1933 elections there were contests in only five wards, none of which were held by Labour. The Party decided to contest three of the wards, whilst ILA candidates stood in the other two. Labour was so short of funds that they pledged to limit spending to only £12 per candidate.(115) However, neither the Labour Party nor the ILA gained any seats. The Conservatives did lose the Blakenhall and St John’s seat, but this was to a candidate backed by local trade unions. The Labour Party had decided not to contest this seat and had pledged not to give recognition to any candidate not in association with the official party.(116) Another successful candidate was Miss M.L.Perry, the former Labour councillor, who comfortably retained her seat as an Independent in the St Matthews ward.

In the 1934 municipal elections, which nationally were Labour’s best results for the decade, the party’s performance in the Black Country was disappointing. This was partly because there had been less of a swing against Labour in the 1931 municipal elections, on which they were based. In Dudley,



for instance, Labour lost two seats, winning only two out of the ten overall. In Smethwick too the party won only one seat, which was the same position as in 1931. The Party did make two gains in Wednesbury and one in Stourbridge, but none in either West Bromwich or Wolverhampton, where the ILA made one further gain.(117)

Labour's performance in the Black Country in the 1935 municipal elections was rather similar to that in Birmingham. In Smethwick, for instance, which was the Black Country town closest to Birmingham, Labour lost two seats, including that of C.H.Marriott, who was chairman of the Trades and Labour Council. Both Labour and the ILA each lost a seat in Wolverhampton, whilst the Conservatives gained three in Dudley. Labour's only gains were in West Bromwich and the recently chartered borough of Rowley Regis, which was part of the Kingswinford constituency. In the newly chartered borough of Oldbury, however, Labour lost three seats, which they had held on the District Council, to Independents.(118)

The problems for the Labour Party in Wolverhampton were made worse by the slump in both individual subscriptions and union affiliation fees. According to the Annual Report individual membership of the Wolverhampton West Party dropped from 650 in 1930, which was the second highest in the region, to 400 in 1931, 381 in 1932 and 267 in 1934, which was the second lowest. For Wolverhampton East a minimum figure of 240 was returned for each of these years.(119) These were the lowest numbers in the whole region. This was at a time when the Labour Party was making big strides nationally to increase membership.

There were reports of officials and delegates not being appointed in some wards, whilst a loan of £150 was needed from Labour Headquarters.(120) In these circumstances the National Organiser for the Midland Regional area, H.Drinkwater, was called in to give advice. He suggested bringing in outside speakers to address ward meetings and calling a special conference of trade unionists. He also thought that the local party should select a new parliamentary candidate and try to bring about a reunion of party members.(121)

During 1934 the West Wolverhampton Labour Party was twice called upon to support joint action. The first was a move to call a conference to set up a United Front Against Unemployment, but the Executive Committee agreed to take action only "in conjunction with the TUC and the Labour Party.(122) Four delegates had given their names to the Front's Manifesto and one was to be suspended for a year for not rescinding his support for the organisation.(123) Later the Executive Committee

agreed not to take part in a May Day demonstration organised by the Wolverhampton Workers Joint Council and requested their councillors not to attend, "so long as opposition councillors are invited".(124) These actions suggest that the members, who had stayed loyal to the Labour Party, were determined to avoid contacts with the ILA and to toe the official line. This was particularly necessary for financial reasons as the local party was indebted to the national one. Hence on the eve of the 1935 General Election the treasurer was again reporting on the seriousness of the financial position and the need for action.(125)

Meanwhile the Walsall Labour Party was also showing a certain amount of public disunity within its ranks. The main area of concern was amongst the Labour group on the Town Council, where disagreements were being aired in public. The secretary, Councillor Whiston believed that these differences were "chiefly personal antagonisms and largely unnecessary". Group members were requested to attend a meeting on the 17 March 1932.(126) There was much talk here of the group breaking up due to disagreements and non-attendance. There were instances of members voting in opposition to one another and of two members being nominated for one position on a Committee. The secretary repeated his claim that "personalities were at the bottom of the trouble" and that it should be possible for all councillors "to thrash out their differences in private". Eccleston, the chairman, however, pointed out that "the parties most concerned were conspicuous by their absence". McShane, the former MP, then moved a resolution revising the Standing Orders, so that any disagreements were put in writing first.(127)

Soon afterwards a letter was written to the Walsall Observer by an unemployed delegate, Harry Anslow, which criticised the late Labour Government for its failure to deal with unemployment. This aroused some outrage within the party, causing Anslow's temporary resignation from it.(128) A more serious division occurred within the ranks of the Labour group, when Councillor Cartwright, who was on the Public Assistance Committee, voted to support cuts in expenditure despite a group decision to oppose them. Cartwright defended his stand by claiming that his concern was over the level of rate increase needed and that his intention was not to cut relief, but the salaries of officers and administrators. Cartwright's explanation was not accepted, although he did agree to support the Labour whips in future.(129)

More embarrassing for the local Labour Party was Councillor Cresswell's refusal to abide by their decision not to attend the Mayor's luncheon in protest over the Means Test. When instructed to explain



her position at a party meeting, she merely sent a letter, which was followed later by her resignation.(130) This dispute seemed to reflect a move to the left by the Walsall Labour Party at this time, which was reflected in a resolution, which was passed and put to the Party Conference that year. It proposed that “amongst the first duties of a future Labour Government (was) the immediate socialisation and control of the entire system of finance and credit, including joint stock banks, and close control of all industries”.(131) When the resolution was carried at the Leicester Conference, it was reported back that “the Party was recovering its Socialist soul”.(132)

During 1933 the Walsall Labour Party received a memo from the Dudley Labour Group, expressing its serious concern “at the lack of drive by the Executive Committee regarding definite proposals” and doubts whether “Socialist measures vigorously advocated and laid down would be followed if we gained power”. Members of the Walsall Labour Party, prompted by their former MP, McShane, expressed active support for this, with talk of inaction by party leaders and the need to show more fight. It was suggested that a Midland Conference be called to formulate a programme to put to the next Labour Party Conference.(133) Indeed the Dudley memo provided the basis for the local party’s resolution to the Conference that year.(134)

This activity in Walsall came despite more serious divisions within the local party, which were exposed again when a new parliamentary candidate was selected. Following the resignation as candidate of J.McShane, the former MP, in July 1932, six names were put forward to replace him.(135) One of these was Councillor Cartwright, but he was forced to withdraw. This was because he was not a member of the Miners’ Federation but of a breakaway union, which was not affiliated to the Labour Party or the TUC.(136)

Following further withdrawals, the local party then voted by 28 votes to 26 to select J.Eccleston, who was the President of the Pelsall Miners Association.(137) His union branch promised to put up £50 with possibly a further £100. The vote, however, aroused “intense disagreement in the party”, which was “definitely divided into two camps”.(138) It was felt by the supporters of the defeated candidate, Councillor Poole, that Eccleston’s success was due partly to an eloquent speech of support from McShane and partly to the appearance on the night of two additional delegates from Eccleston’s union. McShane had also openly stated that he thought Poole was too young to stand. Criticism of him by Poole’s supporters led McShane to ask for a vote of confidence, which he easily secured.(139) After



a further meeting, at which there were “heated passages” and “heated interchanges”, the selection was finally confirmed by a vote of 26 to 15 with 10 abstentions.(140)

Meanwhile the Walsall Labour Party was experiencing a decline in membership during these years. The 1933 Annual Report gave a figure of 760 for 1932, which was nearly double the 1931 total of 360. Members were not retained, however, with numbers dropping to 660 in 1933 and 459 in 1934 before rising again to 641 in 1935.(141) Ward reports described the situation as “very disappointing”, whilst finances were described as being in “a very poor state”.(142) At the AGM in January 1935 the local party reported a deficit of £80.(143) Meanwhile Councillor Whiston, who was now the agent, called for “a concerted effort by all to cut out all personal differences and heal all internal breeches in view of the imminence of the General Election”.(144)

The problems which the Wolverhampton and Walsall Labour Parties experienced on the eve of the 1935 General Election were not unique to the Black Country. Local parties had always been dependent on the trade unions for financial support. They were now being hit by falling membership and the ‘contracting in’ law. The national drive in 1932 to increase individual membership seemed to be very effective at first within the region. Thus the Annual Report gives a total of 8,766 for the 10 Black Country constituencies in 1932, which was a dramatic increase on the 1931 figure of 5,473. The highest memberships were 1,454 for Kingswinford, 1,519 for Stourbridge and 1,561 for Dudley, whilst even Smethwick, following Mosley’s departure, rose from 240 to 590. Total numbers stayed high for 1933 at 8,013 with both West Bromwich at 1,147 and Wednesbury at 1,150 showing dramatic increases. The major exception to this trend was Wolverhampton, where the Labour Party’s internal problems meant that membership in the East stayed on the 240 minimum, whilst the West had only 381 members. In the following years, however, there was a sudden drop in numbers, so that by 1935 the total had fallen to 6,290. The figures for Kingswinford, Stourbridge and Dudley had dropped to 738, 975 and 514 respectively, whilst the West Bromwich total had fallen by nearly a half to 617.(145)

It seems that Labour’s membership and support held up well in the years immediately following the fall of the Labour Government in 1931, only to drop off in 1934 and 1935. This fall coincided with the revival of the local economy. In their constituency reports on the region for the 1935 General Election the Birmingham Post gave figures for the fall in unemployment between 1931 and 1935. In West Bromwich the drop was 4,000, in Smethwick 6,000 and in Kingswinford 7,000. The total fell from 16,076 to 7,675 in Wolverhampton, 7,341 to 2,889 in Dudley and 11,133 to 5,222 in Walsall.(146)



By 1935 much of the Black Country was experiencing a similar economic recovery to that in Birmingham. A major factor behind this revival was the role played by the region in supplying components for the expanding motor vehicle industry. The National Government's policy of tariff protection also seemed to be vindicated, as the Birmingham Post pointed to new industries being attracted into the region as a result of this policy.(147)

Economic revival in the 1930s did not benefit the Labour Party as the wartime boom had done. One reason for this was that the trade union movement remained subdued. Local workers were conscious that their standard of living was higher than for those in the depressed regions. The result was a decline in active support for Labour, which reflected itself in the form of falling membership, increased apathy at the polls and a grudging acceptance of what the National Government had achieved. Turnouts in the 1935 General Election, for instance, were the lowest since the exceptional circumstances of 1918, with a drop of over 10 per cent in most constituencies. The National Government sought to capture the mood of the electorate with a poster, which was widely distributed across the region at this time. One half showed their 1931 poster with an unemployed man explaining:- 'Mates, help me get a job. Vote for the National Government'. Next to it under the date 1935, the same man is seen saying:- 'I got the job - help me to keep it. Vote for the National Government'.(148)

Although it has been claimed that the Conservatives were not well prepared for this election, having reduced their organisation since 1931, they were certainly in a better position than Labour.(149) Gardner, in his study of the Conservatives in Wolverhampton, shows how a mass membership was built up in the town at this time. Much of it in the West division was middle class and female, being absorbed from the old Primrose League.(150) By 1939 he reckoned that there were 150 business or potential business subscribers.(151) Before the 1935 Election the local party organised a monthly supply of literature, a number of open air meetings and a visit by an Open Air Talking Cinema Van.(152) The local Labour Parties, on the other hand, could not match the resources or organisation of their opponents.

## B. THE 1935 GENERAL ELECTION

### 1. KINGSWINFORD

Labour's three successes in 1935 were all quite narrow victories. The Kingswinford seat, which had been held by Charlie Sitch from 1918 to 1931, was regained by a mere 16 votes. Not long after his

defeat in 1931 Sitch had been sent to prison for 9 months, after being found guilty of embezzling the funds of his trade union, the Chainmakers' and Strikers' Association. As Labour's successes here in the 1920s had been strongly dependent on a personal vote for Sitch, this incident might have affected their chances. On the other hand there had been a significant increase in party membership in the constituency since the 1931 Election. Sitch's replacement, Arthur Henderson, who was no relation to the former leader, concentrated his campaign on attacks on the Means Test and stressed the full nationalisation programme of the Labour Manifesto.(153)

The Conservative MP, Alan Todd, was aware of the force of Labour's argument on the Means Test, as the constituency had suffered badly from the decline of the hand chain making industry in the early 1930s. He announced that "he had never agreed to the present family application of the Means Test", which he accepted was "operating harshly" and "would continue to work to get it altered".(154) He warned that a Labour victory would lead to increased unemployment and a return to the conditions of 1931. He was supported here by the Earl of Dudley, who asserted that if a Labour Government were returned, "the Round Oak steel works and other industrial undertakings in the country would have to close down". This was described by the Express and Star as "political intimidation".(155) Henderson's own response to talk of a financial crisis if Labour were returned, was to warn that the Emergency Powers Act would be used in order to prevent people "sabotaging the general will" of the public.(156)

There was talk of a last minute Liberal intervention, but this did not materialise. In the event the Chairman of the recently formed Divisional Liberal Five Hundred and a number of other local party members took part in Todd's adoption.(157) Their support may have accounted for Todd losing only about 1,000 of his 1931 vote. Labour, however, was able to increase its vote by nearly 1,500, which gave them their narrow victory.

## 2. WEST BROMWICH

In West Bromwich, where Frank Roberts was fighting the seat he had held from 1918 to 1931, the Labour majority was to be larger although still below 1,000. Roberts was a highly respected figure, having been on the NEC throughout the 1920s and the Minister of Pensions in both Labour Governments. His opponent was not the MP, Alexander Ramsey, as he had stood down when appointed director of an employer's federation, but another company director, Robert Ashton from Sevenoaks.



The Liberal vote was considered a key factor in the constituency, since this time, unlike 1931, there was no Liberal standing. The Conservatives had the support of Dr A.E.W.Hazel, a former Liberal MP who had backed Labour in previous elections, and Alderman W.Poultney, who signed Ashton's nomination papers. Roberts, however, had a letter of support from another prominent Liberal, Alderman John Bill.(158) Ashton hoped to exploit the improved employment situation in the borough, along with the Corporation's house building programme. Indeed he pointed out that, thanks to low interest rates, the local Council had increased the number of new houses from 1,500 to 2,800.(159)

Roberts, however, relied heavily on the personal vote, which he had secured over the years. In a later article, written when Roberts retired from parliament, the Birmingham Mail pointed out that "the secret of his hold on West Bromwich has been that he identified himself so completely with the interests and everyday life of its people, that they regarded him as one of their own".(160) At the same time, however, there had been a big increase in individual membership in the constituency from the 240 minimum in 1930 to 973 in 1935.(161) West Bromwich was also one of only three Black Country constituencies to retain an agent during these years.(162) It was these distinctive factors, which helped Roberts to gain his narrow victory.

### 3. WEDNESBURY

Labour's third and biggest victory was at Wednesbury, where John Banfield retained the seat, which he had won in the by-election, with a reduced majority. His opponent was Reverend H.Dunston, who stood as a National Labour candidate, backed by the local Conservative organisation. Banfield, however, proved a strong candidate, putting most emphasis on the constituency's social problems. He campaigned on the abolition of the Means Test and on local housing conditions, citing the case of a man, wife and seven children living and sleeping in one bedroom.(163) He called for a subsidy to the local authority to assist in the provision of new houses, claiming that conditions were worse than those in Glasgow. He highlighted one backyard in Tipton, where 23 people were living and sharing one lavatory.(164)

The Labour Party here was greatly helped by increased individual membership with numbers rising from 461 in 1931 to 1,147 in 1933 and 973 in 1935.(165) This was a constituency, whose individual memberships had rarely risen above the 180 minimum during the 1920s. To combat the Labour appeal Dunston's main strategy was to stress the economic record of the National Government, especially the

impact that Protection had made on employment prospects in the constituency.(166) Banfield's victory margin of nearly 3,000 was a reminder of what Labour had achieved in the 1920s. The turnout, however, was only 78.1 per cent compared with 88-89 per cent during the 1920s.

#### 4. SMETHWICK

Smethwick was the other seat, which Labour had held throughout the 1920s. Given the party's performance in recent local elections, it was probably not surprising that they failed to win it back in 1935. It appears that there was still something of a backlash following the departure of Oswald Mosley, although this probably took the form of apathy at the polls rather than outright opposition. The turnout of 70.7 per cent was the lowest in the Black Country and down from 74.7 per cent in 1931 and 78.9 per cent in 1929.(167)

Another problem for Labour was that Roy Wise, who had captured the seat for the Conservatives in 1931, proved a popular MP, especially it seems with the young. Wise was a maverick member, who refused to be bound by the rigid party system, and spoke freely on his main concern, which was imperial development.(168) He also condemned the Peace Ballot as "a grotesque sham", believing that the government should not fully support the existing covenant of the League of Nations.(169)

The Labour candidate, Dr Brock, appeared to take some time to settle to the campaign with his meetings reported as failing to arouse enthusiasm. He was attacked as an "out and out Socialist, who is preaching an idealism that has no relation to circumstances".(170) He spent much time attacking unemployment but locally Smethwick was now experiencing increased employment. Similarly his concern over poor housing conditions in the constituency was challenged by the slum clearance programme launched by the National Government. Even the cry of 'dear food' from a protectionist Government seemed to have little appeal.(171)

The problem for Labour was that enthusiasm for the party was not growing as local membership figures show. Having leaped from 240 members in 1931 to 590 in 1932 and 617 in 1933, party membership then dropped to 545 in 1934 and 535 in 1935.(172) Faced with a populist candidate and an improving employment situation, the Labour Party was unable to convince the local electorate that it was a viable alternative. One local observer noted that Brock improved as the election progressed, revealing "fighting qualities that surprised me".(173) Even this statement, however, suggests that the



local party was not totally behind their candidate. Wise won with a fairly convincing majority of over 1,500.

## 5. BILSTON

Labour's best hope of success in Wolverhampton was probably at Bilston, which had been held from 1924 to 1931. The Conservative MP, G.K.Peto, had retired to be replaced by Ian Hannah, who claimed to be on the left of the party. His support for the Peace Ballot, along with "reasonable rearmament" probably ensured him the backing of many local Liberals, including their 1929 candidate, Major S.T.Thompson, who spoke on the same platform.(174) The normally Liberal Wolverhampton Express and Star also called for the return of a National Government "by a substantial majority". The paper warned that if Labour were returned, "the result can only be chaos" with "violent changes in the economic order" at a time unsuited for "hazardous experiments". Baldwin was praised as "the most Liberal minded leader the Conservatives ever had" and whose governments "have continually in mind the lot of the workers and the troubles of the depressed areas".(175)

The Labour candidate, D.L.Mort, had been nursing the seat since the retirement of John Baker after the previous election. The local party had a strong tradition within the region for its membership and organisation. Unfortunately it no longer had Sam Hague as its agent. Nevertheless in 1934 party membership was the highest in the region at 995. This proved to be the peak for the decade, as the total for 1935 was only 763.(176) The Birmingham Post accused the Labour Party of putting too much emphasis on the decay of capitalism in a constituency where employment was rising and the Government's industrial policy seemed to be working.(177)

Hannah retained the seat for the National Government with a majority of 869 votes. A significant factor here was also the low turnout, which was down from over 80 per cent at the previous three General Elections to only 70.9 per cent.(178) Hannah stressed his moderation as a factor in his success, claiming that he was "not a die-hard" and would be "on the left side of the Conservative Party". Mort stressed the bad weather on polling day and the lack of motor cars at his disposal as factors behind his defeat.(179) It seems more likely that working-class apathy was encouraged by the economic climate, which persuaded many workers that they risked losing their jobs by voting Labour.

## 6. WOLVERHAMPTON WEST

Elsewhere in Wolverhampton Labour's prospects were much weaker. In the West Division the party was not only split, but also short of members and up against the populist appeal of Sir Robert Bird. The decision to fight the seat had been made by Labour soon after the 1931 General Election. It was felt by the Midland Region National Organiser, H.Drinkwater, that party organisation would be improved "if a good fighting candidate were in the field".(180) An attempt was made to secure Charles Ede, a prominent Labour politician and former MP for South Shields., but it appears that he was unwilling to stand.(181) It was then resolved to nominate Jessie Stephens, but this was blocked by Head Office.(182) Eventually the Reverend R.Lee from Coventry, who was suggested by Drinkwater, was nominated in May 1933.(183)

In September of the same year W.J.Brown announced his decision to fight the seat again for the ILA, with the backing of £1100 from the Civil Service Association. Brown denounced Lee, claiming that he was in the field "because the Labour Party could get no one better". He went on to say that Labour had been trying for months to get a trade union candidate or a wealthy man, "but there was not a trade union leader in the country, who would fight that seat while he was in the field and no wealthy man would throw his money away".(184)

Lee's response to this was to accuse Brown of dividing the working class at a time when Fascism threatened.(185) This brought a reply from W.G.Clemson, Chairman of the ILA, who in a letter to the Express and Star, claimed that Lee was misled about the local situation, when he was persuaded to stand, due to "blind hatred for a genuine Labour man on behalf of the local officials of the Labour Party". He went on to claim that "these local caucuses never believed in, preached or practised the barest elements of Socialism".(186)

This clash set the pattern for the election campaign, with the two Labour men appearing more concerned with fighting each other than Bird. In this matter Brown emerged the undoubted winner as Lee proved a lacklustre candidate. Moreover despite setting up a special election fund on the 25<sup>th</sup> April 1935 the West Wolverhampton Labour Party was desperately short of money.(187) On the 22<sup>nd</sup> October they agreed to accept a loan of £200 from a Mr Grainger to help contest the seat. At the same time it was agreed by the Executive Committee to limit expenditure to £210.(188)

Brown's finances were on a much sounder footing. He also had important backers, including Lloyd George, who telegraphed his support.(189) Brown promised action on unemployment, including raising



the school leaving age and granting pensions at 60.(190) Meanwhile Bird concentrated on the economic successes of the National Government, boasting that "short time has practically gone; full time and even overtime are becoming the rule in Wolverhampton".(191) He also backed the Government's modest rearmament programme, quoting Baldwin's declaration that "there has not been, there is not and will not be any question of huge armaments or materially increased forces".(192)

Bird won a comfortable victory, polling more than the combined vote of the two Labour candidates. Lee came a poor third, losing his deposit. Even in defeat Brown seemed more concerned over his rivalry with the official Labour Party, claiming that "it was incumbent upon me to fight the vicious and corrupt caucus, which now dominates the Labour movement in Britain". He blamed his defeat on the bringing in of Lee, as he had "split the progressive vote".(193)

## 7. WOLVERHAMPTON EAST

In Wolverhampton East the position of the Labour Party was little better. This was a constituency, which had been held continuously by the Liberals throughout the inter-war years, and where Labour had come third in every General Election they had contested. Only in 1929 had they exceeded 25% of the poll. Furthermore party membership had stood at a not very impressive 240 since 1931 in this predominantly working-class constituency.(194) Their candidate, H.E.Lane, was a local man, who was expected by the Birmingham Post to take votes from the Liberals. Indeed the paper thought that Geoffrey Mander, the Liberal MP, would lose his seat to John Brockhouse, the Conservative.(195)

Mander had stood as a National Liberal in 1931, although opposed by both Conservatives and Labour candidates. As a Samuelite Liberal he had withdrawn his support for the government, following the introduction of tariffs. Brockhouse, who was a West Bromwich manufacturer, reckoned he could win the seat by stressing the economic advantages that Protection had brought to the constituency.(196)

Instead it was Mander, who squeezed the Labour vote, by stressing his opposition to the Means Test and supporting the peace efforts of the League of Nations.(197) His strongest support remained amongst the Nonconformist community of locksmiths in Willenhall.(198) He was therefore able to increase his majority over the Conservatives by 1,700 to 4,000. The Labour vote fell by roughly the same amount to just below 5,000, giving them only 15% of the total, which was their lowest since 1922. The only sign of a Labour advance here, which eventually gave them victory in 1945, was the

success of the ILA in local elections, where they challenged the Liberal hold in the two eastern wards of St. James and St Matthews.(199)

## 8. WALSALL

In Walsall, where the local Labour Party had selected J.Eccleston as their candidate in November 1933, open conflict erupted early in 1935. According to the Walsall Observer "various sections have not been harmonising as they might... Some take the view that Labour cannot hope to win Walsall unless they have a candidate with a national reputation". Others defended the choice, pointing to the former popularity of local leaders, such as Alderman Thicket and J.McShane, the former MP. Eccleston was not considered "a brilliant platform man" but had the advantage of "a sound and sober knowledge of working-class aspirations and an obvious sincerity, which many people admire". According to the local press much of the opposition to the candidate came from the left in the form of members of the ILP and those, "who are alleged to have Communist views". Asked at a meeting in February 1934 about uniting with the ILP, the Communist Party and the Unemployed Workers Union, Eccleston had refused to give a guarantee that the Walsall Labour Party would affiliate with the ILP.(200)

In March 1935 delegates had been read a letter from Harden Ward, which was Councillor Poole's base, complaining of "the inactivity of the candidate, the necessity to poll more votes at the next election and the lack of effort to influence the electorate". Poole himself spoke, declaiming any part in the letter, but pointing out that "the bare majority vote of the Selection Conference was proving a difficulty". He spoke of a "lack of propaganda" and thought "the town should have been stumped from end to end". The secretary and agent, Councillor Whiston, added that the candidate had attended only two of the Sunday evening meetings, which had been held regularly for six months in the wards. He pointed out though that they should not expect "the strenuous efforts, which had been shown by Mr McShane". Eccleston was defended by McShane who spoke of "the disgusting manner in which the letter had been used in the press" When a vote was taken, delegates backed Eccleston by 33 votes to 7.(201)

Meanwhile membership of the Walsall Labour Party was falling. Having risen from 360 in 1931 to 760 in the following year, it then dropped to 660 in the 1933 and 459 in 1934. There was then a small revival to 641 in 1935.(202) The fall was reflected in the financial situation within the party, which was so bad that on the 23<sup>rd</sup> May the Financial Committee resigned en bloc. Councillor Whiston warned that



“sections of the party would not work together or were willing to let things drift... there was greater enthusiasm outside the party delegates than was evidenced inside”.(203) He later decided to tender his resignation as the Labour Party Agent.(204)

A Special Delegates' Meeting of the party was held in July 1935, attended by the Assistant National Organiser, R.T.Wimble. He spoke of concern within the NEC over the fall in membership and the apathy in the constituency towards the Victory to Socialism campaign. Concern was also shown over the termination of the agent's appointment on the eve of a General Election. Delegates then spoke of personal differences within the local party and the lack of interest in ward meetings. Whiston spoke of the failure of the candidate to justify his selection, as he had not been able to inspire enthusiasm within the party. Eccleston defended himself by saying that he had received little co-operation from councillors but had been welcomed in the wards and by trade union branches. Windle then warned that “the Party could not enter a fight in this frame of mind, the outlook would be disastrous”. He concluded by saying that “he had never before met such a defeatist spirit” and on the question of the candidate “he felt it was the wish of the party to reconsider the matter”.(205)

Windle attended a further delegates' meeting on the 29<sup>th</sup> August, claiming that Headquarters wanted the constituency's problems sorted out, since “it is industrial, it has been represented in Parliament by a Labour member and it is marginal”. He warned that the local party was in a terrible position with “no literature distributions, no unity, very little propaganda”. Delegates then voted by 26 to 21 to reopen the question of the parliamentary candidate.(206) A week later Eccleston agreed to resign complaining “of lack of support generally from members of the party”.(207) His letter of resignation was leaked to the press. In it he wrote that he had “never received from certain prominent people in the party that support and loyalty to which I was morally entitled”.(208)

Such were the divisions within the party, that no other local candidate was considered. Instead a list of outsiders was drawn up, but the best choices declined to stand.(209) A move was made to select Sir William Jowett, who had been the Attorney General in the last Labour Government, but had then been expelled from the Party for joining the National Government. The NEC, however, rejected such a move.(210) Eventually on the 14<sup>th</sup> October W.Graham, a London merchant, was appointed. He had been a conscientious objector in World War 1 and was recommended as the best informed on international relations.(211)

As the General Election followed soon afterwards, the Labour Party had little time to reorganise and rally behind their candidate. Leckie, the National Liberal MP, had the advantage not only of being the local man, but also of presiding over a big improvement in the town's economic position, with unemployment falling by over a half since the previous General Election.(212) One local issue that aroused feeling was the National Government's decision to tax the reserves of the Co-operative Societies.(213) Graham made a big appeal for Liberal support on the grounds that Leckie was no longer true to his principles but dependent upon the Conservatives.(214) He also attacked housing conditions in the town, claiming that "the poorest Chinese labourers are not living under such abominable conditions as exist in the Birchfield Ward".(215) The problems associated with unemployment and the Means Test were also emphasised, but it was felt that, since they were no longer urgent issues in Walsall, they tended to identify the party with the depressed years.(216)

The result was an increase in Leckie's majority by nearly 2,500 to 6,555, with the Labour vote falling by nearly 4,500. In accounting for Graham's poor performance the local paper thought that he was "not completely at home in the ranks of Labour" and there was "something of a gulf between him and his supporters", which was not bridged. It was also thought that the trouble over Eccleston's candidature had compromised Labour's position amongst the miners.(217) Leckie, meanwhile, had the advantage of being associated with an improving economy as well as being the local man, whilst Graham was "a complete stranger".(218) Nevertheless Graham's vote and his proportion of the total were almost identical to that of McShane in 1929. What had made the seat harder for Labour to win in 1935 was that, whilst in 1929 Labour was opposed by both a Conservative and a Liberal, it was now faced by a single National Liberal candidate.

Following the election there were disagreements between the Walsall Labour Party and their former candidate over expenses. There were a number of items, which Graham refused to pay and when the Executive Committee requested a meeting, they received "an insulting reply".(219) Eventually the secretary and agent met him in London in the presence of Windle, the Assistant National Organiser. Graham agreed to make some payment but the secretary complained "very bitterly of the attitude adopted by the candidate and also his gross insults when asked to deal personally with the matter.(220) The incident illustrates the financial plight of local Labour Parties in the region at this time, making them dependent upon outsiders with money to fight elections.



## 9. DUDLEY

In Dudley Labour had a strong candidate in Wedgwood Benn, who was the former Secretary for India in the 1929 Labour Government. Until 1927, however, Benn had been a Liberal, accusing Labour in 1924 of having produced "a cascade of counterfeit promissory notes". He also described calls to class war as "a mocking of the needs of the people" and as "unsound economically and wrong morally".(221) Benn was now hoping to gain Liberal votes in a two horse race, but his earlier career and statements left much ammunition to his Conservative opponent.

In 1931 the Liberals had backed Joel, the Conservative candidate, who expected this support to be continued in 1935.(222) The president of their Association expressed the view that "Liberals here if they vote at all in this election, must either vote for Mr Joel, who satisfactorily answered the Dudley Association's questions and has the approval of the Council of Action or they must vote for one who left us, when the political skies were dark; one who is now not a Liberal but a Socialist, a renegade who seeks to destroy the Liberal Party as a political force and Liberalism along with it".(223)

There had been a dramatic increase in party membership in Dudley since 1930, when the number of individual members totalled only 240. This figure rose to 880 in 1931 and 1,561 in 1932, before dropping back to 977 in 1933, 752 in 1934 and 514 in 1935.(224) This increase had probably been made necessary by the defection of Oliver Baldwin, whose finances had previously underwritten the local party. Dudley was also one of only three Black Country constituencies to retain an agent in 1933.(225) Labour had not performed well in recent local elections in Dudley, losing three seats to the Conservatives in those held two weeks before the General Election. Here again the Conservatives could put much emphasis on increased prosperity with unemployment falling from 7,341 in 1931 to 2,885 in October 1935. The Birmingham Post painted a picture of new industries moving in and of existing ones extending their premises. The choice was summed up as "more prosperity versus Labour".(226)

Joel's vote was down by over 2,000, but the Labour vote also fell, leaving the Conservative majority down 1,500 at 2,445. Benn claimed that he had seen documents "sent by employers to their workpeople telling them if they voted Socialist and the Socialist Government was elected, they would lose their jobs". Benn described this as a "scandal" with workers already in "economic servitude" now being put in "political servitude".(227) This type of pressure, which was not unusual in the Black Country at this time, must have had some effect on potential Labour voters, if only to keep them away from the poll.(228)

## 10. STOURBRIDGE

The Stourbridge constituency had increased the number of its electors since 1931 by 10,000 to 80,000, which reflected its changing character as parts of the seat became a middle class commuter region for Birmingham. Unemployment had fallen dramatically in the main industrial regions, such as Halesowen from 2,100 to 500 and Oldbury from 3,000 to 800.(229) Local Labour Party membership having peaked at 1,519 in the Depression year of 1932 fell away slightly to 1,300 in 1933, 1,000 in 1934 and 975 in 1935.(230) These high numbers, however, reflected the fact that Stourbridge was one of the few Black Country constituencies to still support a full time agent.(231)

The 1935 contest was a three cornered fight with the same candidates as in 1931. Wellock, who had held the seat for Labour between 1927 and 1931, was a well-known pacifist, who concentrated much of his campaign on the threat of war. He denounced the National Government not just for trying to hide “one of the most barren four years in modern parliamentary history”, but also for carrying through an anti-League of Nations policy.(232) His supporters placarded the constituency with posters, illustrating war crosses and calling for “election crosses not wooden crosses”.(233)

Morgan, the Conservative MP, described himself as “pro-sanctionist”, standing for “national defence, peace and prosperity” under a National Government.(234) He dismissed Wellock as “an extreme pacifist” and his Liberal opponent as a Free Trader.(235) His cause was considerably helped by the increase in local trade. Indeed his supporters put up posters depicting people happy as a direct result of National Government activity, whilst Labour posters were denounced as “an insult to our honoured dead”.(236) The result was an increase in Morgan’s majority by around 1,500 to 5,301. Much of this was due to the decline in the Liberal vote, which fell by around 3,500. Wellock, himself, increased his vote by 687 on a much lower turn out.(237)

## C. CONCLUSIONS

The results of the 1935 General Election in the Black Country seem to confirm Stannage’s verdict that economic factors were the main reason for the National Party’s victory.(238) There had been a big fall in unemployment in the Black Country since 1931, which made it easy to portray Labour as the Party linked with the 1931 collapse and likely to damage confidence if re-elected. Pressure at the workplace from employers helped further this view. Moreover the Labour Party manifesto, which stressed nationalisation, allowed them to be portrayed as extremist. Even on the question of social



reform, which was badly needed in the Black Country, the National Government could counter by pointing to its house building programme, as well as its rushed increase in the child allowance and its promise to raise the school leaving age. Foreign policy appears to have been less of an issue here, except in Stourbridge, where Wellock, the Labour candidate, was a well-known pacifist.

The total Labour vote for the 1935 General Election, including the ILA vote in Wolverhampton West, was up by less than a thousand at 167,441 on the 1931 figure. This gave Labour 42.8 per cent of the poll, compared with 40.1 per cent in 1931 and 44.8 per cent in 1929. The swing to Labour was well below that even of Birmingham, but the total percentage remained considerably higher. The results do show, however, a consistency in the Labour vote at these elections. The main change from 1929 was the collapse of the Liberal vote, which went predominantly to the Conservatives under the National banner. Thus where the Liberals won 20.5 per cent of the vote in 1929, they secured only 8.4 per cent in 1931 and 7.7 per cent in 1935.

The statistics for the Black Country are very similar to those for West Yorkshire, where the Labour Party gained 43 per cent of the vote, securing 10 MPs out of 23, whilst the National Parties won 45.9 per cent and the Liberals 9 per cent.(239) This was enough for Reynolds and Laybourn to consider the region to have secured its position as a 'Labour Heartland'.(240) The authors claim that there had been a successful drive to increase individual membership, whilst the Labour organisation had been re-invigorated. Finances remained precarious, "but that had always been the case".(241) Laybourn claims that by 1935 Labour was considered "respectable" and "responsible". They had won over the working class, but had failed to capture the middle-class Liberal vote, which had swung to the National Party.(242) He appears not to recognise a working-class Conservative vote in that region.

In the Black Country, on the other hand, the National Party was slightly stronger, so that Labour was able to win only 3 of the 11 seats. The National Party's strength was largely due to the survival of a working-class Conservative vote and the absence of Liberal candidates in most constituencies. They also had the advantage of being backed by the organisation and financial resources of the Conservative Party. Local Labour parties, on the other hand, remained handicapped by their low membership numbers and poor finances. Many were also suffering from the long-term effects of the divisions brought about by the events of 1931.

The local press too was firmly anti-Labour with even Liberal papers, such as the Wolverhampton Express and Star and the Walsall Observer, put off by the Party's apparently extremist policies. Labour



was also affected by the low turnout in this election. A number of reasons have been suggested to explain this, including the wet weather and the shortage of cars on Labour's side.(243) It seems more probable though that a number of working-class voters, sensing the economic improvement over the previous four years, preferred to stay at home.

#### **D. THE STATE OF LOCAL PARTIES 1936-39**

Following the 1935 General Election left-wing elements appeared to have a greater say in both the Wolverhampton and Walsall Labour Parties. On the 30<sup>th</sup> June 1936, for instance, a resolution from an AEU Branch was proposed to the Wolverhampton Labour Party Executive, calling for the Communist Party to be affiliated to the Labour Party, "so as to combat the menace of Fascism and War".(244) On the 2<sup>nd</sup> July a motion was carried by the party asking the NEC to place a motion on the agenda at the Party Conference calling for the affiliation of the Communist Party.(245)

In July 1937 W.J.Brown, who had been readopted as the future ILA candidate, agreed to contest Stroud as a Popular Front candidate. Within six months the ILA was to dissolve itself and affiliate to the Co-operative Party, enabling them to maintain some independence, whilst opening the way to links with Labour. Soon after this the local Labour Party, under the influence of Drinkwater, the Regional Organiser, took steps to find a prospective candidate for West Wolverhampton. Drinkwater suggested that Jim Simmons, the former MP for Erdington, be proposed and this was agreed unanimously.(246) On the 14<sup>th</sup> August Jim Simmons, who had recently lost the Erdington by-election as a pacifist candidate, was unanimously adopted at a Special Party Conference.(247) Two weeks later a programme of activities was drawn up by Drinkwater to further the new candidate's campaign.(248)

The selection of Simmons, although suggested by the regional party officials, shows the left leaning nature of the West Wolverhampton Party. This was further illustrated in November/December 1937 when the Communist Party held a series of lectures in the Labour Rooms. When challenged both the treasurer and the secretary disclaimed any knowledge of the bookings.(249) On the 2<sup>nd</sup> October 1938 the local Labour Party joined with the Communist Party and the Left Book Club in a united demonstration, which both the Co-operative Party and the Liberals had withdrawn from. It seems that it was the Communist Party, which was the driving force behind the action.(250) This was all part of the move to involve Constituency Labour Parties in Popular Front activities, which the Birmingham Party had become involved in.



Despite this on the 2<sup>nd</sup> February 1939 the local party carried a motion endorsing the action of the NEC over the expulsion of Sir Stafford Cripps for his advocacy of a Popular Front.(251) This action would suggest that the moderates had prevailed in the local party, which would confirm the views of Jones in Borough Politics. He claims that it was the extremists who joined the ILA, leaving “harmony” amongst those that remained. For this he credits the leadership of A.Davies, the railwayman, who became Chairman of the local party and leader of the Group, and C.W.Hill, who was the secretary of both. Jones claims that they were “able, commanded the respect of followers, kept their fingers on the pulse of Council activities and exercised moderate, tactful yet firm leadership”.(252) There was even a slight improvement in membership during these years from a low 240 in the 1936 to 310 in 1939.(253)

A more pronounced left-wing element also appeared in the Walsall Labour Party at this time. During the abdication crisis delegates unanimously protested to the Daily Herald over the attention it was giving to the monarchy. A majority also criticised party leaders over their attitude to the crisis and for not exploiting the matter in the interests of the working class.(254) Then in May 1937 a motion was carried protesting to the NEC over its threat to expel members of the Socialist League for its support for the Unity Campaign.(255) Later the Walsall delegates, unlike those in Wolverhampton, unanimously backed Cripps after his expulsion from the Party.(256)

Attempts were made to improve local party unity. In particular the Labour Group on Walsall Council had to sign a declaration that they would accept the whip. Delegates were to be informed if councillors missed three consecutive meetings without an explanatory letter.(257) None of this, however, seemed to improve party membership, which dropped from 482 in the 1936 to 256 in 1938 before rising to 407 in 1939.(258) Indeed the local party seemed to hit a crisis early in 1939, when the secretary announced his resignation at the AGM over “the lack of organisation in most of our wards”.(259)

Other local constituency parties seemed to be in an equally poor state during these years. Smethwick’s membership, which stood at 535 in 1935, dropped to 404 in 1937, revived slightly in 1938, before slumping to 249 in 1939.(260) In January 1938 the Smethwick Trades and Labour Council was said to be “in a state of chaos” and there was a move to appoint a subcommittee “to examine the whole question of organisation in the borough”.(261) In February it was reported that the Trades and Labour Council would no longer meet as a joint body.(262) Other constituency parties also experienced drops in membership at this time. Stourbridge, for instance, which had 1,000 members in 1936, dropped to 700 in 1937 and 620 in 1939. Indeed total party membership in the ten Black Country



constituency parties fell by a third from 6290 in 1935 to 4275 in 1938, before making a modest revival to 4457 in 1939.(263)

Another important indicator of the strength of the Labour Party in the region in 1939 was the fact that there were only two full time agents in Black Country constituencies. In 1930 there had been six. The situation was even worse in Birmingham, where there was only one agent in 1939.(264)

These dismal figures are reflected in the municipal election results between 1936-1938, when there was to be no swing back to Labour. In 1936, for instance, Labour lost three seats in both Dudley and Wednesbury, one in West Bromwich and a net loss of one in Smethwick. Only in the recently incorporated borough of Rowley Regis did Labour achieve any success, capturing three seats from Independents and a majority on the Council.(265)

In 1937, however, Labour lost three seats in Rowley Regis along with two in Wednesbury and one in Stourbridge, Dudley and Smethwick. In Rowley Regis Labour had an ambitious programme for new housing schemes, municipal offices, welfare measures and an improved deal for council workmen, but the opposition, fighting as Independents successfully accused them of extravagance, wastefulness and officialdom (266)

In 1938 Labour lost a further seat in each of Smethwick, Wednesbury and Dudley, whilst gaining one in Stourbridge, Walsall and West Bromwich.(267) The result left Labour with 16 out of 40 seats in Walsall, 6 out of 16 in Wednesbury, 11 out of 33 in West Bromwich, 18 out of 59 in Wolverhampton and 9 out of 32 in Smethwick.(268) One explanation for this poor performance in municipal elections, was the existence of anti-Socialist alliances, which Reynolds and Laybourn have also noted in West Yorkshire.(269) Thus from 1936 onwards the main opposition to Labour in Wolverhampton, Walsall, Stourbridge, West Bromwich, Rowley Regis and Oldbury came from so called Independents. Only in Smethwick and Dudley, where the Liberals were no longer strong, did the Conservatives fight under their own party label.

Two weeks after the 1938 municipal elections on the 16<sup>th</sup> November a by-election was fought at Walsall, following the death of Leckie, the National Liberal MP. Since the by-election was held only a few weeks after Chamberlain had signed the Munich Agreement, it was seen by many commentators as a test of approval for the Prime Minister. At the recently held Oxford by-election, for instance, the Government had triumphed, but at Bridgwater a startling victory was secured by Vernon Bartlett, who stood as an Independent Progressive with unofficial Labour backing.(270)



Another National Liberal, Sir George Schuster, stood for the Government. Unlike his predecessor he was not a local man, but a director of a number of banks as well as being chairman of Allied Suppliers Ltd, which controlled a group of multiple shopping companies.(271) Schuster appealed for a vote of confidence in Chamberlain's policy, claiming that he could no longer support the Treaty of Versailles or justify a war to return ½ million Germans in Czechoslovakia. His watchwords, he claimed, were:- "Peace in the world based on strength, generous social services at home, based on prosperity in industry and good employment".(272) In his election address he stated that the British needed a leader, who "must be known in other countries and believed in as a man of peace". Labour's policy, he claimed, "would have landed us in war".(273)

The Labour Party laid much importance on this by-election. As evidence of this it can be pointed out that, whilst the local party could only raise £90 for expenses, £300 was supplied nationally from the By-Election Insurance Fund. This enabled an agent, Pat Connolly, a joint organiser of the Party, to be appointed.(274) The Labour candidate, G.Jeger, had been adopted unanimously as candidate for the General Election earlier in the year. He was a London journalist and mayor of Shoreditch, who agreed to assist the party financially, promising about £190 for election expenses.(275)

Jeger denounced the Government over Munich for having "betrayed its pledges, encouraged aggression and sabotaged the League". He attacked them for failing to follow a policy of collective resistance to aggression through the League of Nations.(276) He warned that the Munich Agreement had not brought peace:- "Everybody is asking where will Hitler strike next".(277) Jeger outlined Labour's peace policy, which called for "a collective stand.... against lawlessness and aggression" and the calling of a world conference to "deal with legitimate grievances and to evolve a system of security and economic opportunity, which will remove the causes of war".(278) Jeger also tried to stress domestic as well as foreign affairs, raising the matter of old age pensions and the Means Test.(279) There were also visits from prominent figures in the party, including Clement Attlee. In an open letter he highlighted incompetence in the production of anti aircraft defences, whilst also pointing out that unemployment nationally had risen by 400,000 during the year.(280)

Schuster, however, won with a substantial majority of over 7,000. Labour's one satisfaction was to increase its vote by nearly 2,000 and reduce the 1935 majority by a similar amount. Schuster put his victory down to "the fact that Mr Chamberlain has saved this country from the risk of war and that the best hope for better employment and greater expenditure on social services lies in supporting a



Government that works for peace and creates that confidence on which prosperity depends".(281) It was also felt that women voters, who made up the majority of electors in the constituency, favoured Chamberlain's policy, being "very grateful to the Prime Minister for the bold initiative he took in dispersing the clouds of war".(282)

Jeger reckoned that he had lost because "the people of Walsall are so bewildered by recent events that they have not yet come to an understanding of the effects of Munich on the nation's future".(283) He also claimed that "on account of his Jewish origins" he had been subjected to "a certain amount of vile abuse" by local speakers supporting his opponent.(284) The former Walsall MP, J.McShane, argued that since the local party lacked unity "it had not for years had an adequate machine in the town". He also claimed that memories of the horrors of war were still intense, so that people in Walsall thought that Chamberlain "had saved them from dreadful perils". The local party president, Hamson, admitted that "there were working-class wards, where Labour has nothing like a proper organisation".(285) Pat Connolly, the election agent, blamed the Chamberlain influence, stating that "taking all into account it must be realised that we are still under the Birmingham influence".(286) It seems that in this by-election, in which foreign policy was the major issue, the government candidate had the advantage.

In these circumstances pressure was put on the local party to impose some discipline and unity. At the next delegates meeting Connolly, the joint organiser of the Labour Party, praised the local party's campaign but warned that "local people were not turning out in the desired strength for winning such a fight". He claimed that meetings had been well attended and all points of policy covered. Defeat, he reckoned, had come in the last three days of the campaign, due to the tactics of the opposition in their poster campaign. At the same time he praised the Labour candidate for "his willingness to work and fight". Connolly went on to suggest the need for a membership campaign to enrol 10 per cent of the 22,000 Labour poll.(287) Judging from the Annual Report there appears to have been some improvement in membership with numbers, which had sunk from 304 in 1937 to 256 in 1938, rising to 369 in 1939.(288)

It is hard not to conclude that the 1930s were a disappointing decade for the Labour Party in the Black Country. Whereas in the 1920s the region had been ahead of similar working-class regions in its support, during the 1930s it seemed to be trailing. Thorpe, in his study of the Labour Party in Derby, points to a strong revival in the mid 1930s with the party regaining control of the borough council in



1934 and returning one Labour MP in 1935.(289) Similarly in West Yorkshire Reynolds and Laybourn have Labour winning 43 per cent of the vote and returning 10 of 23 MPs in the 1935 General Election. A major reason for this, they claim, was the Labour organisation. Thanks to a successful campaign to increase individual membership there was “a re-invigoration of the whole movement”.(290) On the other hand Savage in his study of the Labour Party in Preston detects a malaise in the local party here similar to that in the Black Country. Despite the high unemployment the party lost parliamentary and municipal elections. Savage claims that unemployment divided the working class, whilst women were alienated by the policies towards them of the 1929 Labour Government.(291)

Labour’s decline in the Black Country did not begin with the 1931 General Election, as Labour had performed better than average in the region, despite the upsets caused by Mosley and Brown. Indeed ward organisation as judged by party membership peaked in 1932 and 1933. In the following years, however, with employment and economic activity improving more quickly here than in Labour’s northern heartlands, it was the National Government that got the credit. Local Labour parties began to suffer from a shortage of funds and poor organisation. A mass membership had not been built up in the constituencies, leaving the local parties dependent on the work of a few active members and the finances of a trade union movement, which had become weakened and shackled during the inter-war years.

Behind this situation lay a decline in working-class confidence in their own institutions. This was not helped by the divisions and disunity, which affected many local parties during the 1930s. It would be wrong, therefore, to see the Labour Party at this time moving inexorably towards its great success of 1945. In fact had a General Election been called in 1940 the party was unlikely to have improved on its 1935 performance in the region.

## FOOTNOTES

- 1 The view that the 1930s were “black years” or “the devil’s decade” was common especially amongst the politicians of both parties in the post-war years. The politicians of the pre-war years were discredited for allowing mass unemployment and the appeasement of Hitler. This view of the politicians is reflected to a certain extent in Mowat, who described them as “pygmies”. Nevertheless even he accepts that the National Government “was not unsuccessful in its economic policies”. Mowat, C.L. (1955), p.142 and 412. One historian to favour a pessimistic view of the

economy in the 1930s has been Alford. He accepts that there was economic growth in the 1930s but this was due to cyclical factors, which ended in 1937. Growth only continued after this due to the Government's rearmament programme. Overall growth was no greater than in the late 19<sup>th</sup> Century, except that in the 1930s there was a high level of unemployment. Alford, B.W.E.

Depression and Recovery? British Economic Growth 1918-1939 (1972). Other historians, such as Webster, have remained pessimistic about the quality of working class life during the 1930s.

Webster, C. 'Health, Welfare and Unemployment during the Depression', Past and Present 109 (1985), pp.204-30. Laybourn accepts that the standard of living did improve in the inter-war years but for those sections of the working class living in the old declining industrial areas there was a fall. Laybourn, K. (1990), p.4.

- 2 Stevenson, J. and Cook, C. Britain in the Depression Society and Politics 1929-1939 (1994 ed). Thorpe, A. (1992), pp.64-5. Economic historians have pointed out that there was economic growth of between 2.3 and 3.3 per cent in the 1930s with the biggest period of growth for the whole inter-war period coming in the mid 1930s. With the fall in the cost of living in the 1920s and early 1930s real wages were a third higher in 1938 than in 1913. Aldcroft, D.H. The Inter-War Economy 1919-39 (1960), Chapters 1, 4, and 6. Pollard, S. The Development of the British Economy, 1914-80 (1983), Chapters iv and v.
- 3 The leading exponent of the Keynesian view has been Skidelsky, R. (1967).
- 4 The view that the effects of tariffs have been exaggerated can be seen in the views of Capie, who has written that "in terms of what Chamberlain was looking for ... the tariff can hardly be considered a success and its role in stimulating the manufacturing section must have been small". Capie, F. Depression and Protectionism: Britain between the Wars (1983), pp.139-40. On the other hand Thorpe has written that tariffs did stop dumping, helped restore confidence and "brought a significant shift of trade towards the Empire". Thorpe, A. Britain in the Nineteen Thirties (1992), p.73.
- 5 Thorpe, A. (1997), p.79.
- 6 There were other factors behind the drift to the left after 1931. Many moderates had lost their seats at the Election. Memories of the events of 1931 with the attempt to accommodate with capitalism were strong. The trade unions, who at this time were a force for moderation, were distracted by unemployment. Finally there was the leadership of Lansbury, who was himself a pacifist. The high



- water mark of the move to the left was the Hastings Conference of 1933, when Labour voted to initiate a General Strike to prevent involvement in another war. Thorpe, A. (1992), pp.26-7.
- 7 Pimlott, B. Hugh Dalton (1985), p.232 describes this block, though the historian he refers to for the origins of the term is Naylor. Naylor, J.F. Labour's International Policy: the Labour Party in the 1930s (1969), p.135.
  - 8 Laybourn, K. (1988), p.94. This was reinforced by the fact that of the 32 of the 46 MPs elected in 1931 were sponsored by the trade unions. Cole, G.D.H. (1948), pp.264-5.
  - 9 'For Socialism and Peace' was adopted at the Southport Conference in 1934, giving high priority to nationalisation, the setting up of a National Investment Board, but with no commitment to deficit spending.
  - 10 'Forward to Socialism' called for more nationalisation, workers' control and socialist planning. At the 1934 Labour Party Conference at Southport the League tabled 75 amendments to 'For Socialism and Peace', which were reduced to 12 by standing orders. All, however, were rejected due in large to the trade union block vote.
  - 11 Labour Party Annual Report 1933, p.50.
  - 12 Stannage, T. Baldwin Thwarts the Opposition (1980), p.66.
  - 13 In 1933 £4,326 was paid out, but only £4,029 paid in. 185 District Labour Parties and many smaller unions paid nothing. Ibid., p.68.
  - 14 Labour Party Annual Report 1934, p.44, Annual Report 1935, p.55 and Annual Report 1936, p.60.
  - 15 The number of affiliated trade union members fell from 2.04 million in 1929 to 1.86 million in 1934, rising to 1.91 million in 1935. Labour Party Annual Report 1935, p.55 and Annual Report 1936, p.60.
  - 16 Stannage, T. (1980), pp.75-76. The financial situation explains why out of 45 by-elections between 1931-5 Labour failed to contest 13 of them. Cole, G.D.H. (1948), p.313.
  - 17 Cook, C. Liberals, Labour and Local Elections (1975), pp.175-6.
  - 18 1934 was also the year that Labour captured control of the LCC for the first time in the March elections. Smart, N. (1999), p.97.
  - 19 Labour did capture West Toxteth in July 1935 with an 18.9 per cent swing. Stevenson, J. and Cook, C. (1994 ed), p.135.

- 20 According to Stannage much of the electorate, especially the poor, were said to be frightened by Labour's plans to nationalise the banks Stannage, T. (1980), p.77.
- 21 Stannage, T. (1980), pp.77-8.
- 22 The TUC had voted in support of economic sanctions against Italy at its September conference. Lansbury, a leading pacifist, feared that this would lead to war.
- 23 Attlee was appointed leader, as he had been Lansbury's deputy. After the General Election he defeated Greenwood and Morrison in a leadership contest.
- 24 Ramsden, J. (1978), p.344.
- 25 One recent historian has described Baldwin as playing for the patriotic vote in this Election:- "Wrapping himself in the Union Jack and basking in the reflected glory of the Jubilee, he played the role of the British bulldog". Brendon, P. The Dark Valley: A Panorama of the 1930s (2000), pp.356-60.
- 26 Mowat, C.L. (1955), p.553.
- 27 Dalton, H. The Fateful Years (1957), p.72. Smart questions the idea that Baldwin had "stolen the clothes" of the Labour Party with his support for the League by pointing to the strong pacifist element in the Labour Party. Smart, N. (1999), p.120.
- 28 Taylor, A.J.P. (1961), p.383.
- 29 Stannage, T. (1981), p.170 and pp.242-3.
- 30 State planning became the major thrust of Labour's economic policy at this time, rather than worker's rights or the role of local authorities. "This victory for Statism was due to the success of the USSR and the Social Democratic experiments in Sweden and New Zealand. Thorpe, A. (1997), p.83. .
- 31 Thorpe, A. (1992), pp.29-30.
- 32 Stevenson, J. and Cook, C. (1994 ed), pp.283-4.
- 33 "Virtually all the Labour hierarchy were agreed that lack of leadership had affected the Party's performance". Ibid., p.284.
- 34 Ibid., p.285.
- 35 Dalton predicted that Labour would win over 200 seats. Pimlott, B. (1985), p.230.
- 36 Stevenson, J. and Cook, C. (1994 ed), p.284.
- 37 For further details of this struggle see Pimlott, B. (1977).



- 38 Stevenson, J. and Cook, C. (1994 ed), p.285.
- 39 The swing to Labour in by-elections between 1931-5 was 15.8 per cent. Thorpe, A. (1997), p.89.
- 40 Cook, C. Liberals, Labour and Local Elections (1975), pp.176-8.
- 41 NEC Minutes, Campaign Committee Meeting 18 November 1938.
- 42 Reynolds, J. and Laybourn, K. (1987), p.147. The Labour Party captured Batley and Morley in March 1939 and Colne Valley from the Liberals in July 1939.
- 43 Ibid., P110. The figures for Labour representation on West Yorkshire Municipal Councils were:-  

1930 – 156	1931 – 137	1932 – 142	1933 – 162	1934 – 185	1935 – 182	1936 – 194
1937 – 189	1938 – 169.					
- 44 Ibid., P151.
- 45 Thorpe, A. (1990), pp.111-28.
- 46 The three unions were the NUR on the railways, the AEU at Rolls Royce and the TGWU at British Celanese. Ibid., p.115.
- 47 The Co-operative Party was Derby's largest single affiliate with 5,000 members before 1932, rising to 10,000 by 1939. Ibid., p.117.
- 48 Ibid., p.120.
- 49 Laybourn, K. (1988), p.95.
- 50 Thorpe's conclusion is that it was "almost impossible to see how Labour could have avoided a further General Election defeat, perhaps almost as severe as that of 1935, had the Second World War not intervened". Thorpe, A. (1997), p.89.
- 51 Stevenson, J. and Cook, C. (1994 ed), p.286.
- 52 Thorpe, A. (1997), p.89.
- 53 Ibid., p.97.
- 54 Thorpe, A. (1992), p.123.
- 55 Boughton, J. (1998), pp.16-20.
- 56 The swing in Birmingham was 5.7 per cent compared with a national swing of 9.4 per cent. Other cities, which recorded a below average swing were:- Newcastle 5.7 per cent and Edinburgh 5 per cent whilst in Wolverhampton the swing was 3.6 per cent. Stannage, T. (1980), P267-8.
- 57 The figures for the new Council were:- Conservatives 67 seats, Labour 18 seats, Independents 4 seats, Liberals 2 seats. Birmingham Post, 2 November 1932.

- 58 The figures for the new Council were:- Conservatives 66 seats, Labour 22 seats, Independents 3 seats, Liberals 3 seats. Ibid., 2 November 1933.
- 59 Ibid., 31 October 1934. The figures for the new Council with three new wards and nine new seats including aldermen were:- Conservatives 87, Labour 37, Liberals 1, Independents 5. Ibid., 2 November 1934.
- 60 The figures for the new Council, including aldermen, were:- Conservatives 96, Labour 32, Liberals 4, Independents 4. Ibid., 2 November 1935.
- 61 Ibid., October 1935, 1 November 1935.
- 62 Labour Party Annual Report 1932, p.141, Annual Report 1933, p.120, Annual Report 1934, p.116, Annual Report 1935, p.119, Annual Report 1936, pp.136-7. See Appendices Table H.
- 63 Stannage, T. (1980), p.229.
- 64 Town Crier, 22 November 1935. The six Birmingham constituencies were:- Aston down 800 (+2.4 per cent swing), Deritend down 1,000 (+5.6 per cent swing), Duddeston down 1,500 (+3.3 per cent swing), Ladywood down 1,700 (+0.1 per cent swing), Sparkbrook down 500 (+4.9 per cent swing), West Birmingham down 1,300 (+3.8 per cent swing). See Appendices Tables C and D.
- 65 They claim that lower middle-class Liberal voters could not identify with the working class Labour Party. Reynolds, J. and Laybourn, K. (1987), p.126.
- 66 Hastings, R.P. (1959), pp.161-3.
- 67 Stevenson, J. and Cook, C. (1994 ed), p.285.
- 68 Stannage claims that the heavy rain on polling day helps explain the fall in turnout across the country. Stannage, T. (1980), p.226.
- 69 Briggs, A. (1952), pp.289-90.
- 70 Hastings, R.P. (1959), p.160. Hill gives a less optimistic view of Birmingham's economic recovery in the mid and late 1930s, claiming that it "should not be overstated", with some firms continuing in recession until after 1934 and others never recovering. Hill, B.K. (2003), p.131.
- 71 Birmingham Post, 18 November 1935.
- 72 For the three by-election results were see Appendices Table C.
- 73 Wright, the National Conservative, was quoted after the election saying:- "The verdict of the electors is an emphatic repudiation of the pacifist attitude of starving our defence forces and a clear



indication that the constituency supports the government's rearmament programme as the safest guarantee of the preservation of peace". Birmingham Post, 21 October 1936.

74 Birmingham Gazette, 20 October 1936.

75 This was accepted by Attlee, who along with Dalton supported Simmons:- "You in Birmingham might have temporary advantage from the manufacture of munitions. You may get some work but you know that it won't last. It is not really prosperity to be engaged in building up armaments". Ibid.

76 Ibid., 30 April 1937.

77 Town Crier, 30 April 1937.

78 Birmingham Gazette, 12 May 1939. It also stressed "a disinterested and apathetic electorate" on 17 May 1939.

79 Ibid., 10 May 1939.

80 Ibid., 11 May 1939.

81 Birmingham Post, 17 May 1939.

82 Ibid., 18 May 1939.

83 Birmingham Gazette, 17 May 1939.

84 Ibid., 2 November 1936.

85 The figures for the new Council were:- Conservatives 75 seats + 23 aldermen, Labour 23 seats + 7 aldermen, Liberals 2 seats + 2 aldermen, Independents 2 seats + 2 aldermen. Ibid., 3 November 1936.

86 Town Crier, 6 November 1936.

87 The figures for the new Council were:- Conservatives 80 seats + 23 aldermen, Labour 20 seats + 7 aldermen, Liberals 1 seat + 2 aldermen, Independents 1 seat + 2 aldermen. Birmingham Gazette, 2 November 1937.

88 Town Crier, 5 November 1937.

89 Ibid., 4 November 1938.

90 The figures for the new Council were:- Conservatives 85 + 23 aldermen, Labour 15 + 7 aldermen, Liberals 1 + 2 aldermen, Independents 1 + 2 aldermen. Birmingham Post, 2 November 1938.

91 Labour Party Annual Report 1936, p.60, Annual Report 1937, p.120, Annual Report 1939, pp.202 and 365-8, Annual Report 1940, pp.45 and 113. See Appendices Table H.

- 92 Hastings, R.P. 'Birmingham Labour Movement 1918-45', Midland History 5 (1979-80), pp.86-7.
- 93 AEU membership rose from 5,760 in 1935 to 12,245 in 1939. Strikes were successfully held at the Rover Shadow Factory and the Austin Aero Factory in 1938. Ibid., p.86.
- 94 Labour Party Annual Report 1940, p.45.1927 was the year when Baldwin's trade union legislation brought in 'contracting in', which led to a drop from 3.24 million to 2.04 million. Labour Party Annual Report 1935, p.55.
- 95 Ibid., p.87.
- 96 Birmingham Labour Party Minutes, Delegate Meetings, 11 May 1938, 25 May 1938.
- 97 Pimlott, B. (1977), p.157.
- 98 A further letter was sent by Shepherd, requesting the local party to refuse help from anyone not in the Party. Birmingham Labour Party Minutes, Special Executive Committee Meeting, 8 June 1938, Delegate Meetings, 9 June 1938, 13 July 1938.
- 99 With regard to the memorandum sent out by Cripps over the setting up of a Popular Front the local party agreed "that steps are necessary to prevent anti-government forces fighting each other at the next General Election, we cannot, however, support the full proposals laid down in the memorandum". Ibid., Delegate Meeting, 8 February 1939.
- 100 Hastings, R.P. (1979-80), p.89.
- 101 The Times, 26 July 1932.
- 102 Birmingham Post, 26 July 1932.
- 103 Ibid., 28 July 1932.
- 104 Ibid., 16 July 1932. Banfield singled out Lansbury's eve of poll visit as a factor leading to "the conversion of many waverers". Midland Advertiser and Wednesbury Borough News 30 July 1932.
- 105 Birmingham Post, 26 July 1932.
- 106 Lord de La Warr (National Labour) wrote to Stonehaven asking for Central Office to intervene and force the local Conservative association to take a National Labour candidate, especially as the seat had been Labour from 1919-29 and several National Labour ex-MPs were looking for seats. Stonehaven wrote back that he and Captain Margesson had tried to persuade the local constituency to accept a National Labour candidate, but 'they had proved obdurate', being unwilling to hand over their party machine and finances. (Baldwin Papers) Stannage, T. (1980), pp.34-5.
- 107 Birmingham Post, 18 July 1932.



108 Birmingham Gazette, 21 July 1932, 22 July 1932.

109 Midland Advertiser and Wednesbury Borough News, 30 July 1932.

110 See Appendices Table E.

111 Birmingham Gazette, 3 November 1932.

112 Wolverhampton Labour Party Minutes, Executive Committee Meeting, 4 October 1932.

113 See Appendices Table E.

114 See Appendices Table E.

115 Wolverhampton Labour Party Minutes, Special Executive Committee Meeting, 12 October 1933.

116 Ibid.

117 See Appendices Table E.

118 See Appendices Table E.

119 Labour Party Annual Report 1931, p.137, Annual Report 1932, p.138, Annual Report 1933, p.119, Annual Report 1935, pp.117-8. See Appendices Table G.

120 Wolverhampton Labour Party Minutes, Executive Committee Meeting, 25 February 1932.

121 Ibid., Special Executive Committee Meeting, 5 April 1932.

122 Ibid., Executive Committee Meeting, 23 January 1934

123 The four members were summoned before the Executive Committee, where they were asked to withdraw their signatures and repudiate any authority they might have given for using their names. One member, Mr Chitty, who refused to accept the decision, was suspended for one year. Ibid., Executive Committee Meeting, 25 January 1934, Local Labour Party Meeting, 1 February 1934.

124 Ibid., Local Labour Party Meeting, 17 April 1934.

125 Ibid., Executive Committee Meeting, 29 August 1935.

126 Walsall Labour Party Minutes, Delegate Meeting, 3 March 1932.

127 Ibid., Special Delegate Meeting, 17 March 1932.

128 In his letter Anslow criticised the Labour Party for having done nothing when in power for the unemployed. Ibid., Delegate Meeting, 31 March 1932.

129 Ibid., Delegate Meetings, 5 May 1932, 12 May 1932.

130 Ibid., Delegate Meetings, 23 June 1932, 7 July 1932, 21 July 1932.

- 131 The local party also sent resolutions against Labour forming a future minority Government and for Standing Orders to be altered allowing more individual freedom for Labour MPs in voting and speaking. Ibid., Delegate Meeting, 8 June 1932.
- 132 Ibid., Delegate Meeting, 24 November 1932.
- 133 Ibid., Delegate Meeting, 8 June 1933.
- 134 Ibid., Delegate Meeting, 13 June 1932.
- 135 The six names were Councillors Whiston, Poole, Cartwright, Mr J.Eccleston, Mrs A.Jones and Mr Dan Hopkins. Ibid., Special Executive Committee Meeting, 15 September 1933.
- 136 Ibid., Special Election Conference 2<sup>nd</sup> Session, 19 October 1933.
- 137 Ibid., Special Election Conference Final Session, 9 November 1933.
- 138 There was almost immediate opposition to Eccleston over an interview, which he gave to the local press, before he had been endorsed by H.Q. The local secretary said that this was “absolutely against our rules and also H.Q. rules”. Ibid., Special Executive Committee Meeting, 16 November 1933.
- 139 Ibid., Delegates Meeting, 23 November 1933.
- 140 Ibid., Delegates Meeting, 7 December 1933.
- 141 Labour Party Annual Report 1932, p.138, Annual Report 1933, p.119, Annual Report 1934, p.114, Annual Report 1935, p.117 and Annual Report 1936, p.145. See Appendices Table G.
- 142 Walsall Labour Party Minutes, Delegates Meeting, 30 August 1934, 13 September 1934.
- 143 Ibid., AGM, 24 January 1935.
- 144 Ibid., Delegates Meeting, 3 January 1935.
- 145 Labour Party Annual Report 1932, p.138, Annual Report 1933, p.119, Annual Report 1934, p.114, Annual Report 1935, pp.117-8, Annual Report 1936 p.145. See Appendices Table G.
- 146 The figures for Walsall and Kingswinford, Birmingham Post 6 November 1935; for Dudley, Ibid., 7 November 1935; for Wolverhampton, Ibid., 12 November 1935; for Smethwick and West Bromwich, Ibid., 13 November 1935.
- 147 “The former National Projectile Factory and its adjoining premises from being void and useless have become a great hive of productive industry, employing hundreds of workers and housing among their trades, at least one which but for tariffs might never have come to England at all”. Report on Dudley. Birmingham Post, 7 November 1935.



148 Ibid., 14 November 1935.

149 Ramsden has claimed that the Conservatives had reduced their organisation since the 1931 General Election, released very little propaganda prior to the campaign and produced only one and a half million leaflets. Ramsden, J. (1978), p.344.

150 Gardner reckoned that women members rose from 40 per cent in 1918 to over 52 per cent by 1928, and were fully involved on committees and as subscribers. Gardner, K.D. (1994), p.140.

151 Ibid., p.63.

152 Ibid., p.114.

153 Wolverhampton Express and Star, 9 November 1935.

154 Birmingham Post, 6 November 1935.

155 Wolverhampton Express and Star, 13 November 1935.

156 "Even a mild person like myself is not going to spend his life helping to build up a great Labour movement to see it sabotaged if in office by thoughts of a banking crisis. We should take all the steps that the other side would take against us and we would stop people from sabotaging the general will of the people". Birmingham Post, 6 November 1935.

157 The Liberals argued that it would be unfair to their candidate and cause to put up an eleventh hour candidate. Ibid., 6 November 1935.

158 Ibid., 13 November 1935.

159 Ashton also claimed that where 3 million workers had had their wages reduced in 1931 under the Labour Government, 2 million had had theirs increased in the early part of this year. Ibid., 13 November 1935.

160 Birmingham Mail, 1 March 1941 (Labour Party Archives).

161 Labour Party Annual Report 1931, p.137, Annual Report 1936, p.145. See Appendices Table G.

162 The West Bromwich agent remained Guest. The others were Chambers in Dudley and Melsom in Stourbridge. Labour Party Annual Report 1934, p.286.

163 Walsall Observer, 2 November 1935.

164 Wolverhampton Express and Star, 13 November 1935.

165 Labour Party Annual Report 1932, p.138, Annual Report 1934 p.114, Annual Report 1936, p.145.

See Appendices Table G.

166 Wolverhampton Express and Star, 13 November 1935.

- 167 Craig, F.W.S. British Parliamentary Election Results (1969), P241. The other low turnouts were at Bilston (70.9 per cent) and Stourbridge (70.9 per cent).
- 168 Brock did suggest that because of Wise's independence of character, the National Party's leaders were not supporting him. This was denied in letters from Baldwin, Simon and MacDonald. Birmingham Post, 13 November 1935.
- 169 Town Crier, 8 November 1935.
- 170 Birmingham Post, 13 November 1935.
- 171 Unemployment in Smethwick had dropped from nearly 9,000 in the summer 1931 to just 2,400. Ibid., 5 November 1935.
- 172 Labour Party Annual Report 1932, p.138, Annual Report 1933, p.119, Annual Report 1934, p.114, Annual Report 1935, p.117 and Annual Report 1936, p.145. See Appendices Table G.
- 173 Town Crier, 22 November 1935.
- 174 Birmingham Post, 12 November 1935.
- 175 Wolverhampton Express and Star, Editorial 13 November 1935.
- 176 Labour Party Annual Report 1935, p.118, Annual Report 1936, p.145. See Appendices Table G.
- 177 Birmingham Post, 12 November 1935.
- 178 Craig, F.W.S. (1969), p.280.
- 179 Wolverhampton Express and Star, 15 November 1935. Hannah said "I never fought the election on a policy of rearmament – at least I never stressed it. I am not a die-hard – I have fought elections as a Liberal – and I shall be on the left side of the Conservative Party. I shall not oppose reasonable rearmament".
- 180 Drinkwater also suggested (1) holding special ward meetings, where the party had some strength and organisation, (2) calling a special conference of trade unionists with an outside speaker and (3) holding a reunion of party members. West Wolverhampton Labour Party Minutes, Special Executive Committee Meeting, 5 April 1932.
- 181 Ibid., Executive Committee Meeting 26 May 1932, Local Labour Party Meeting, 7 July 1932.
- 182 The reason why Miss Stephen was not selected is not made clear in the Minutes. Drinkwater "explained that information had come into the possession of our HQ, which it was felt should be considered, that any misunderstanding might be cleared up. He outlined the position on behalf of HQ and Miss Stephen made a lengthy statement, explaining the circumstances as far as she was



concerned and intimated that she had requested our HQ to hold any inquiry into the matter". The matter was then deferred. She later withdrew. Ibid., Executive Committee Meetings, 24 November 1932, 26 January 1933 and 30 March 1933.

183 Ibid., Executive Committee Meetings, 30 March 1933 and 23 May 1933.

184 Wolverhampton Express and Star, 20 September 1933.

185 He did this in a letter to the Wolverhampton Express and Star. "It is ludicrous for Mr Brown to talk about unity of the working class against Fascism. Suppose every disgruntled revolutionary were to set up ILA's in every working class constituency. Fascism would have a glorious chance in Britain". Ibid., 23 September 1933.

186 Letter to the Wolverhampton Express and Star. Ibid., 25 September 1933.

187 West Wolverhampton Labour Party, Executive Committee Meeting, 25 April 1935.

188 Ibid., Executive Committee Meeting, 22 October 1935.

189 Lloyd George wrote "Heartily wish you success in your electoral contest. Your presence in parliament would greatly strengthen the forces working for peace and reconstruction and the cure of unemployment. Wolverhampton Express and Star, 12 November 1935.

190 Ibid., 9 November 1935.

191 Ibid., 6 November 1935.

192 Birmingham Post, 12 November 1935.

193 Wolverhampton Express and Star, 15 November 1935.

194 Membership did increase to 284 in 1934 before dropping back to 240 again. Labour Party Annual Report 1932, p.138, Annual Report 1933, p.119, Annual Report 1934, p.114, Annual Report 1935, p.118, Annual Report 1936, p.145. See Appendices Table G.

195 "Mr Mander can rely of course on a Nonconformist vote, assiduously nursed for years, but the Labour candidate, a local man, is expected to increase his poll this time at Mr Mander's expense. If this happens, and the vote for the Unionist and National Government candidate can be increased, it ought just to turn the scale in favour of Mr Brockhouse and enable him to win his first Parliamentary fight". Birmingham Post, 6 November 1935.

196 The Birmingham Post claimed that "in parts of the constituency, within the space of three years, unemployment has been reduced by something like two thirds... Mr Brockhouse is a warm

supporter of the policy of tariffs, which has led to such an expansion of trade". Ibid., 6 November 1935.

197 Mander's response to his victory was to comment that "My election has proved the determination of the electorate to secure peace through the League of Nations and to put an end to the household means test, which were the two chief issues of the electorate as far as I was concerned". Wolverhampton Express and Star, 15 November 1935.

198 Birmingham Post, 6 November 1935.

199 Jones, G. (1969), pp.61-2.

200 The paper described Eccleston as "a rugged and determined type who, once having undertaken a job, likes to see it through". Walsall Observer, 31 August 1935.

201 Walsall Labour Party Minutes, Delegates Meeting, 28 March 1935.

202 Labour Party Annual Report 1932, p.138, Annual Report 1933, p.119, Annual Report 1934, p.114, Annual Report 1935, p.118, Annual Report 1936, p.145. See Appendices Table G.

203 Walsall Labour Party Minutes, Delegates Meeting, 23 May 1935.

204 Whiston tendered 3 months notice as agent at the Executive Committee Meeting on 5 June 1935, which was accepted at the Delegates Meeting, 6 June 1935. A resolution at a Delegates Meeting 20 June to withdraw funds from the General Election fund to pay off the agent's arrears in salary was defeated by 12 to 17. Eccleston was one of those speaking against. Ibid., Executive Committee Meeting, 5 June 1935, Delegates Meeting 20 June 1935.

205 Ibid., Special Delegates Meeting, 12 July 1935.

206 Ibid., Delegates Meeting, 29 August 1935.

207 Ibid., Delegates Meeting, 5 September 1935.

208 Eccleston's letter of resignation:-

"As you know my health has for a long time been causing myself and my friends great concern. You are aware also that since my adoption as candidate, I have never received from certain prominent people in the party that support and loyalty to which I was morally entitled. I have given both these aspects of the case careful and serious consideration and, in the interests of myself and my party, I feel compelled to tender to you my resignation as prospective candidate. I regret I have to mention in my letter of resignation anything about differences in our party, but I cannot honestly allow it to be attributed to health reasons alone"



Walsall Observer, 7 September 1935.

209 The three candidates recommended by HQ were:- R.Smith, the ex MP for Norwich, and former under secretary for Agriculture 1929-31, who declined. J.R.Leslie, secretary of the Shop Assistants Union, who did not reply. K.Brinton, from the staff of the League of Nations, who accepted, but was rejected. Walsall Labour Party Minutes, Executive Committee Meetings 9 September 1935 and 15 September 1935, Delegates Meeting, 26 September 1935.

210 Ibid., Executive Committee Meeting 18 September 1935, Delegates Meeting 26 September 1935, Selection Conference, 14 October 1935.

211 Graham spoke for 40 minutes on matters such as the war and the economic situation. He was accepted with 44 votes and only 2 abstentions (Eccleston and the miner's delegate) Walsall Labour Party Minutes, Selection Conference 14 October 1935, Walsall Observer 19 October 1935.

212 Unemployment had fallen from 11,133 in September 1931 to 5,222 in October 1935. There was a drop of 475 between September and October 1935. Walsall Observer 9 November 1935.

213 Dean, K.G. (1972), p.165.

214 Graham claimed:- "Here is a man who has sacrificed every principle Liberals hold dear. The main planks of his Liberalism have gone. He has sunk his political boat and is as Tory as any Tory". Ibid., p.166.

215 Walsall Observer, 2 November 1935.

216 Birmingham Post, 12 November 1935.

217 Walsall Observer, 16 November 1935.

218 Leckie said:- "We made it quite clear in our campaign what the National Government has done, not only for the country, but for Walsall and that was the determining factor. The work of the National Government brought about a great improvement in trade and commerce, which people realised they would imperil if they voted for the Socialist". Wolverhampton Express and Star, 15 November 1935.

219 Walsall Labour Party Minutes, Executive Committee Meeting, 18 December 1935 The problem arose because the local party had spent £400 on the election, but only £183, instead of a hoped for £240, had been raised by subscription. Ibid., Executive Committee Meeting, 21 November 1935.

220 Graham agreed to pay half of the Co-operative's subscription, £30 for advertisements, £5 for loudspeakers and £5 towards the rent of the agent's office. Ibid., Delegates Meeting, 19 December 1935.

221 Birmingham Post 12 November 1935.

222 "I think I can justly claim", Mr Joel said to a Birmingham Post reporter "I have not let down the many Liberals who then supported me and the record of the Government in the councils of the world, together with the improved state of affairs at home, warrant me appealing to them again with confidence". Ibid., 7 November 1935.

223 Ibid., 12 November 1935.

224 Labour Party Annual Report 1931, p.141, Labour Party Annual Report 1932, p.142, Annual Report 1933, p.122, Annual Report 1934, p.120, Annual Report 1935, p.120, Annual Report 1936, p.148. See Appendices Table G.

225 The agents listed were:- West Bromwich – A.Guest, Dudley – H.Chambers, Stourbridge – S.Melsom. Labour Party Annual Report 1934, p.286.

226 "The former National Projectile Factory and its adjoining premises, from being void and useless, have become a great of productive industry, employing hundreds of workers and housing among other trades, at least one which but for tariffs, might never have come to England at all. Several new industries have come to Dudley, and there have been numerous instances of plant and premises being extended". Birmingham Post, 7 November 1935.

227 Wolverhampton Express and Star, 13 November 1935.

228 The turnout in Dudley was 75.3 per cent, which was down from 80.7 per cent in 1931. Craig, F.W.S. (1969), p,127.

229 Birmingham Post, 7 November 1935.

230 Labour Party Annual Report 1933, p.122, Annual Report 1934, p.120, Annual Report 1935, p,120, Annual Report 1936, p.148. See Appendices Table G.

231 The Stourbridge agent was S.Melsom. Labour Party Annual Report 1934, p.286.

232 Birmingham Post, 7 November 1935.

233 Wellock himself warned of the country moving surely "to the brink of the second and last world war", accusing the National Government of being "anti League of Nations during the past four years". Ibid., 14 November 1935.



234 Ibid., 7 November 1935.

235 Ibid., 14 November 1935.

236 Birmingham Gazette, 14 November 1935, Birmingham Post, 14 November 1935.

237 Turnout was down from 82 per cent in 1931 to 70.9 per cent in 1935. Craig, F.W.S. (1969), p.503.

238 Stannage, T. (1980), pp.242-3.

239 Reynolds, J. and Laybourn, K. (1987), p.124.

240 Ibid., p.128.

241 Ibid., p.127. The authors point to local circumstances, which might have weakened Labour. Sir John Simon was the National Liberal MP for Spen Valley. There was conflict with the ILP in Bradford East. There was a National Labour candidate in Leeds Central. Yet none of these was as serious as the problems that the defection of Mosley and Brown brought to the Black Country Labour Party.

242 Ibid., p.129.

243 This was the explanation provided by D.L.Mort in Bilston. Wolverhampton Express and Star, 15 November 1935.

244 West Wolverhampton Labour Party Minutes, Executive Committee Meeting, 30 June 1936.

245 Ibid., Local Labour Party Meeting, 2 July 1936.

246 Ibid., Special Executive Committee Meeting, 26 July 1937.

247 Ibid., Special Conference, 14 August 1937.

248 Drinkwater outlined the following ideas for assisting the candidate:-

1. An introductory meeting of Simmons and the electors.
2. An appeal for support.
3. Ward meetings.
4. Membership campaign.
5. A winter season campaign.

Ibid., Special Executive Committee Meeting, 30 August 1937.

249 Ibid., Executive Committee Meeting, 2 November 1937.

250 The Wolverhampton Labour Party Executive Committee received a letter from the Communist Party asking for a united demonstration on the 2 October with 2 delegates to act with those from the Communist Party, the Co-operative Party and the Liberals. The other two withdrew, leaving

Labour with the Communists and the Left Book Club. Ibid., Special Executive Committee Meeting, 27 September 1938 and Executive Committee Meeting, 29 September 1938.

251 Ibid., Local Labour Party Meeting, 2 February 1939.

252 Jones, G. (1969), p.170.

253 Labour Party Annual Report 1937, p.122, Annual Report 1940, p.111. See Appendices Table G.

254 The Party's resolution protested that "so much space in last week's issues of the Daily Herald to the monarchical crisis" and felt "the columns could have been more usefully directed to South Wales and other distressed areas". Their resolution attacking the attitude of the Party leaders was passed by 17-7. Walsall Labour Party Minutes, Delegates Meeting, 17 December 1936.

255 The motion read:- "The Walsall Labour Party requests the Executive Committee of the Labour Party to withdraw the threat of expulsion on 1<sup>st</sup> June to those members of the Socialist League concerned in the Unity Campaign. It demands that the EC meet the other parties concerned with the object of removing the difficulties, which have caused the threat of expulsion and by this means secure a united front within the Party". Ibid., Delegates Meeting, 6 May 1937.

256 Ibid., Delegates Meetings, 23 February 1939 and 9 March 1939.

257 Ibid., Special Joint Meeting of the Executive Committee and the Group, 14 December 1937.

258 Labour Party Annual Report 1937, p.122, Annual Report 1939, p.200, Annual Report 1940, p.111. See Appendices Table G.

259 Walsall Labour Party Minutes, AGM, 26 January 1939.

260 Labour Party Annual Report 1936, p.145, Annual Report 1938 and 1939, p.200, Annual Report 1940, p.111. See Appendices Table G.

261 Town Crier, 16 January 1938.

262 Ibid., 4 February 1938.

263 Labour Party Annual Report 1936, p.145, Annual Report 1937, p.122, Annual Report 1938 and 1939, p.200, Annual Report 1940, p.111. See Appendices Table G.

264 Labour Party Annual Report 1930, p.288, Annual Report 1939, p.365. The two agents recorded for June 1939 were F.Coles in Wednesbury and S.Melsom in Stourbridge. The Birmingham agent was R.Belben in Yardley.

265 Birmingham Post, 3 November 1936. See Appendices Table E for results. Apathy was blamed for the losses in Smethwick. Town Crier, 6 November 1936.



266 Ibid., 22 October 1937, Birmingham Gazette, 1 November 1937. See Appendices Table E for results.

267 See Appendices Table E for results.

268 NEC Minutes, Meeting of Campaign Committee, 18 November 1938.

269 Reynolds, J. and Laybourn, K. (1987), p.151.

270 McLean, I.S. 'Oxford and Bridgwater' in Cook, C. and Ramsden, J. (Eds) By-elections in British Politics (1975).

271 Schuster gained an MC in the war and was three times mentioned in dispatches. Birmingham Post, 10 November 1938.

272 Ibid., 16 November 1938.

273 Birmingham Mail, 15 November 1938.

274 It was felt that "without the outstanding local personality of the late member the contest would be more of a political one". Walsall Labour Party Minutes, Joint Executive Committee Meeting and National Party Delegates Meeting, 24 August 1938.

275 At the time the local party had agreed to accept financial responsibility for the General Election with a maximum of £400 and a minimum of £200. Ibid., Special Delegates Meeting, 10 April 1938 and Special Conference, 19 May 1938.

276 Birmingham Post, 9 November 1938.

277 "The Munich Agreement sacrificed the democracy of Czechoslovakia to Nazi blackmail. It has handed over to Hitler new economic and industrial wealth and strengthened him in his plan of European domination. It has brought suffering and misery to many thousands, who have been driven from their homes. But it has not brought peace. Everybody is asking, where will Hitler strike next". Birmingham Mail, 15 November 1938.

278 Birmingham Post, 14 November 1938.

279 Walsall Observer, 5 November 1938.

280 Birmingham Post, 11 November 1938.

281 Wolverhampton Express and Star, 17 November 1938.

282 Birmingham Post, 16 November 1938.

283 Wolverhampton Express and Star, 17 November 1938.

284 Pat Collins, the former Liberal MP, claimed that the people of Walsall would not have made such attacks. Birmingham Mail, 17 November 1938.

285 Walsall Observer, 19 November 1938.

286 Dean, K.G. (1972), p.175.

287 Walsall Labour Party Minutes, Delegates Meeting, 15 December 1938.

288 Labour Party Annual Report 1938 and 1939, p.202, Annual Report 1940, p.113. See Appendices Table G.

289 Thorpe, A. (1990), p.111.

290 Halifax Labour Party had 1,000 members in 1935, rising to 1,200 early in 1937. The City of Leeds had a 2,000 rise in membership April to August 1936. There were two by-election successes in 1939, at Batley and Morley in March and at Colne Valley in July over the Liberals. Reynolds, J. and Laybourn, K. (1987), pp.127 and 147.

291 Savage, M. (1987), p.163.



## CONCLUSION

The initial aim of this thesis was to produce for the first time a breakdown of the strength of the Labour Party in the Black Country between 1918 and 1939. The evidence from the available primary and secondary sources shows that from 1918 to the early 1930s the Labour Party established itself in the region with sufficient strength for the Black Country to have claims to be considered a 'Labour heartland'. Having secured a breakthrough in the 1918 General Election with four MPs and 42.8 per cent of the poll in contested seats, the party's support remained fairly solid throughout the period. It grew steadily to reach a peak of 45.8 per cent in 1929, before dipping to 40.1 per cent in 1931. There was then a modest recovery to 42.8 per cent in 1935, which was exactly the same proportion as in 1918. The figures show that the biggest swing of voters to Labour took place during the First World War, with support remaining fairly solid during the inter-war years, neither expanding nor dropping significantly. This accounts for the consistently small size of the electoral majorities of Labour's MPs as well as the low swing against the party in the 1931 General Election, when Labour lost all its seats in the region. Similarly a Labour recovery during the 1930s was less apparent here than in similar industrial areas. This meant, however, that by the end of the period the region could no longer be considered 'a Labour heartland'.

It has been less easy to meet the second aim of this thesis, which was to supply a full explanation for Labour's varied electoral fortunes. This has been largely owing to the nature of the source material. The thesis has had to rely heavily upon the press and Labour Party records, both of which have significant gaps and limitations. Party records, for instance, have only been available in two instances for the Black Country, whilst much of the local press tended to have an anti-Labour bias. This meant, of course, that there was a lack of balance in covering Labour's electoral fortunes. Even newspaper treatment of constituencies at election times was not always even, as much depended on the parliamentary division's significance as a major population centre or on the personality of the politicians involved. These are major problems but not unique to a study of the Labour Party in the Black Country.

The issue, which transcends the whole of this thesis, however, was Labour's inability to make this region one of its heartlands, despite the party's dramatic breakthrough in 1918 and its success in securing at least two-fifths of the vote in each of the inter-war General Elections apart from 1923.

Explanations for Labour's varied electoral achievements in the Black Country have been discussed in the relevant chapters. Nevertheless certain final conclusions can be made.

The thesis has shown that Labour's initial breakthrough in the Black Country rested almost entirely on its links with the trade union movement, since it provided the bulk of the funds, organisation and MPs at least down to 1926. Non-union parliamentary candidates were invariably unsuccessful at this time. This close link between the unions and the Labour Party parallels the findings of other Labour historians, such as those presented nationally by McKibbin and locally by Reynolds and Laybourn in their study of the West Riding. In particular, the sudden emergence of the Labour Party in the Black Country seems to reinforce McKibbin's claim that it was a combination of the new extended franchise and the growing class consciousness of the industrial working class that enabled Labour to win support in the immediate post-war years. The link between the unions and local constituency parties had developed in the years just before and during the First World War. This was a time of full employment, which brought the unions rising membership and influence. Indeed most of the local parties in the region appear to have emerged from their local trades councils and in some cases seemed almost inseparable. In this respect this thesis reinforces McKibbin's claim that it was the efforts of these union dominated local parties that brought Labour success in the post-war years.

McKibbin, however, was also aware of the limitations on Labour's expansion at this time, comparing the party's achievements in Britain unfavourably with those of the Social Democrats amongst the German working class. Howard went further by pointing out that the trade union link had its drawbacks, as it deterred Labour from broadening its support amongst the non-unionised working class and other sections of society. Savage, in his study of Labour in Preston, describes how the local party's initial success was tempered because of its inability to break away from its trade union roots. The evidence from the Black Country constituencies gives some backing for this position as the region experienced only a slow expansion in Labour's support during the early 1920s. The loss of Dudley in 1922 following its capture in a by-election in the previous year was a blow to Labour and illustrates the weakness of some local parties at this time. As a major characteristic of the region's constituency parties in the post-war years was their low individual membership this was not surprising. It left them very much under the influence of the trade unions at a time when union membership and funds were being hit by the post-war slump and a series of defeated strikes. Nevertheless, although expansion was slow through the first half of the 1920s, there is no evidence here of any major reversal in the fortunes



of the Labour Party in the Black Country during this period. This thesis does not support the pessimistic views of the unions of Howard and Savage, but recognises the importance of the trade union link in giving local parties a solid base in the early 1920s, although restricting them from expanding more widely.

During the late 1920s ward organisation, particularly party membership, came to play a part in the electoral fortunes of the Labour Party. This was particularly important at this time as constituency parties were being hit not just by falling trade union membership, but also by the new law forcing their members to contract into the Labour Party, following the defeat of the General Strike. This thesis has shown that where local parties were able to improve their ward organisation some success followed. Bilston, for instance, expanded its individual memberships and broadened its appeal by incorporating a successful Women's Section. It is possible that defeats for trade unions in industrial disputes and the loss of some of their powers encouraged more individual members to join their local constituency party. The by-election victory in Stourbridge, for instance, seems largely to have been a consequence of improved organisation, especially the big growth in individual membership. The successful candidate, Wellock, was an active pacifist and socialist rather than a trade union official. Parallels here can be made with the changes made to the ward organisation of the local party in Preston in the middle to late 1920s, as described by Savage.

Improvements in ward organisation and membership were evident in most Black Country constituencies during the time of the 1929 Labour Government. Even the fall of this government and the electoral defeat of 1931 did not immediately change matters, as the peak years for individual membership were 1932 and 1933. During the mid to late 1930s, however, many of the Black Country Labour constituencies seemed to retreat to their trade union roots. This was at a time when unemployment in the region was declining, although union membership remained low and fairly static. Indeed Labour's three successes in the 1935 General Election came in constituencies where the union link was always more important than individual membership.

During the mid to late 1930s the decline in the individual membership of many local parties in the Black Country and their indifferent electoral fortunes was a contrast to the national picture. Labour's inability to fully re-establish its position here during these years means that the region can no longer be described as one of its heartlands. This contrasts sharply with the situation described by Reynolds and Laybourn in the West Riding and Thorpe in Derby, where Labour experienced a major recovery in the



late 1930s. Labour's position in the Black Country, however, was matched by that in Birmingham, whilst Savage has noted a similar malaise in the local party in Preston.

It seems, therefore, that most but not all the constituency parties in the Black Country remained predominantly under trade union influence during the inter-war period. This was sufficient to provide Labour with its initial success in the region, but it failed to make it the majority party during this period when trade union membership, finances and influence were all in decline. Improvements in ward organisation in some constituencies during the late 1920s and early 1930s seemed to be giving local parties a new direction. Although this helped to bring Labour further successes for a time, the change was not widespread nor was it deep rooted in many constituencies. The result was that most seemed to revert to being under union influence by the end of the period.

Personality also played a significant role at various times during this period. Labour benefited in the early 1920s from having moderate, hard working MPs. They were active in Parliament on behalf of their constituents, whilst their trade union roots contributed to their popularity. With their relatively small majorities these factors were quite important to their electoral success. During the late 1920s, however, the crisis in trade union membership encouraged local parties such as those in Smethwick and Dudley to entrust their fortunes to a rich patron, who could provide the wealth and publicity to fight electoral campaigns. There was a similar situation in Wolverhampton West, although in this case the personality concerned was a well financed trade union official. In all these cases, however, the result for the local party proved to be disastrous in the 1930s, as the personalities involved were responsible for splits and divisions in the critical year of 1931.

The fortunes of the Labour Party in the region were also affected by the nature of the opposition. Liberalism was less a threat to Labour because its organisation, which was weak even before 1914, had virtually collapsed in many constituencies during the inter-war period. Yet in the three divisions of Wolverhampton East, Walsall and Stourbridge, where the Liberal Party survived as a force, it could still damage Labour's prospects. This was because the Liberal vote was predominantly a working-class one and traditionally opposed to the Conservatives. Wolverhampton East was certainly a seat, which Labour should have won had Liberalism not secured such a hold there. In both Walsall and Stourbridge the Liberal vote was significant enough to delay Labour's efforts to develop a separate identity.

It was the Conservative Party, however, which remained the major threat to Labour's expansion, especially since it secured significant support amongst the working class in the region. Its strength lay



amongst non-unionised workers, particularly those who felt economically insecure. It was these workers who were most likely to be attracted by the idea of protective tariffs. At the same time, however, the Black Country Conservatives lacked the reforming traditions of the Unionists in Birmingham. Most of their candidates tended to be hard-headed local businessmen, whose main election strategy seemed to be either to frighten the electorate over the disasters a Labour Government would bring or to warn of the loss of jobs that would come without the adoption of tariff reform. These policies had some success amongst the economically insecure, especially in the 1930s, when the working class was generally on the defensive. At other times, however, Conservative policies must have seemed rather negative compared to the reforms that Labour was proposing.

One strategy, which helped the Conservatives at important times throughout the inter-war years, was to agree with the Liberals over forming anti-Socialist pacts. The aim was to confront Labour with one candidate at elections. Stressing the word Socialist rather than Labour was partly propaganda as this term was more likely to frighten those who felt threatened by a Labour administration. The pacts were used in this form mainly in local elections, as in Wolverhampton in 1927, where appeals to ratepayers over potentially high council spending under Labour could also be made. For parliamentary elections the one party approach of the National Party in the 1930s can be seen to have had a similar impact. Given Labour's high percentage of the vote but rather low success rate in the form of MPs in several inter-war parliamentary elections, the presence of only one opposing candidate was a major factor in restraining Labour in the region during the inter-war years. It helped the Conservatives to retain a large proportion of the working-class vote so that by the end of this period it was they rather than Labour, who were in the predominant electoral position.

It is difficult to estimate the effect that unemployment had on voting habits. Labour seemed to perform best when the economy was strong as in 1918 and to a certain extent in 1929. At other times fear of unemployment seems to have led many workers to look to the apparent economic security offered by Conservative tariff policies. This seems to have been a major factor for the support given to them in the 1930s in the form of the National Government. One problem for Labour was that nationally the party took time to develop an effective policy for dealing with unemployment.

The third aim of this thesis was to compare the strength of the Labour Party in the Black Country with that in Birmingham and in the nation as a whole. The impact on Birmingham politics of the strength of Unionism during the inter-war years has already been considered. There was a significant

economic factor behind this. The persistence of small-scale workplaces in workshops and factories encouraged a common interest between employer and employed. This was less evident in the Black Country although here too there were small-scale workplaces. The difference was that much of the work here tended to be semi or unskilled with lower pay rates than in Birmingham. There was less workplace collaboration and more scope for confrontation as can be seen in the rash of strikes, which affected the region in the period around the First World War. The uniqueness of the Black Country lay in the distinctive nature of much of its employment, which encouraged a parochial attitude as well as a sense of community. The survival, for instance, of Liberalism in industrial Wolverhampton East exemplifies this situation. It meant that parts of the region were relatively isolated from many of the trends and attitudes affecting both the national situation and nearby Birmingham. The distinctiveness of the Labour Party in the Black Country can be seen in its performance in all the inter-war General Elections with the exception of that of 1929.

This thesis has been able to advance the historiography of the Labour Party on a number of issues which historians have disputed. Where this has happened reference has been made here and in the conclusions to each chapter. On one overriding issue, however, this thesis has shown that contrary to many assumptions Labour was a major force throughout the Black Country during the inter-war years. It has challenged the idea that the region was simply an extension of Chamberlain's Birmingham. Whilst it is true that the party's performance here during the 1930s prevented it from becoming a 'Labour heartland', the figures show that Labour was winning solid support from at least two-fifths of the electorate throughout the period. By illustrating the distinctive nature of Black Country politics, it can no longer be assumed that the Unionist Party dominated the whole of the West Midlands during the inter-war years.



APPENDICES

TABLE A. GENERAL ELECTION RESULTS IN THE BLACK COUNTRY BETWEEN THE WARS

1. 1918 GENERAL ELECTION

DUDLEY

Electors	26,103		
Sir A.S.T. Griffith-Boscawen (Coalition Con)	9,126	60.2%	
W.B. Steer (Lab)	<u>6,046</u>	<u>39.8%</u>	
	3,080	20.4%	
Turnout	60.4%		

KINGSWINFORD (STAFFS.)

Electors	37,924		
C.H. Sitch (Lab)	10,397	47.6%	
A.E. Beck (Con)	7,509	34.4%	
H.E. Brown (Lib)	<u>3,943</u>	<u>18.0%</u>	
	2,888	13.2%	
Turnout	57.6%		

SMETHWICK

Electors	32,908		
J.E. Davison (Lab)	9,389	52.2%	
Miss C. Pankhurst (Coalition Women's Party)	<u>8,614</u>	<u>47.8%</u>	
	775	4.4%	
Turnout	54.7%		

STOURBRIDGE (WORCS.)

Electors	42,205		
J.W. Wilson (Lib)	8,920	38.5%	
Miss M. MacArthur (Lab)	7,587	32.7%	
F.V. Fisher (Coalition National Democratic Party)	<u>6,690</u>	<u>29.8%</u>	
	1,333	5.8%	
Turnout	55.0%		

WALSALL

Electors	42,900		
Sir R.A. Cooper (Coalition National Party)	14,491	52.3%	
J. Thickett (Lab)	8,336	30.0%	
W.H. Brown (Lib)	<u>4,914</u>	<u>17.7%</u>	
	6,155	22.3%	
Turnout	64.7%		

WEDNESBURY

Electors	34,415		
A. Short (Lab)	11,341	49.8%	
A.W. Maconochie (Coalition Con)	10,464	45.9%	
R.L.G. Simpson (Lib)	<u>988</u>	<u>4.3%</u>	
	877	3.9%	
Turnout	66.2%		

WEST BROMWICH

Electors	32,777		
F.O. Roberts (Lab)	11,572	54.0%	
Viscount Lewisham (Coalition Con)	<u>9,863</u>	<u>46.0%</u>	
	1,709	8.0%	
Turnout	65.4%		

WOLVERHAMTON BILSTON

Electors 28,504		
T.E. Hickman (Coalition Con)	10,343	60.5%
J.W. Kynaston (Lab)	<u>6,744</u>	<u>39.5%</u>
	3,599	21.0%
Turnout 59.9%		

WOLVERHAMPTON EAST

Electors 30,437		
G.R. Thorne (Lib)	7,660	51.8%
Rev. J.A. Shaw (Coalition National Democratic Party)	<u>7,138</u>	<u>48.2%</u>
	522	3.6%
Turnout 48.6%		

WOLVERHAMPTON WEST

Electors 37,097		
A.F. Bird (Coalition Con)	13,329	56.8%
A.G. Walkden (Lab)	<u>10,158</u>	<u>43.2%</u>
	3,171	13.6%
Turnout 63.3%		

2. BY-ELECTIONS 1918-22

DUDLEY 3 March 1921

Electors 25,305		
J. Wilson (Lab)	10,244	50.7%
Sir A.S.T. Griffith-Boscawen (Coalition Con)	<u>9,968</u>	<u>49.3%</u>
	276	1.4%
Turnout 79.9%		

WOLVERHAMPTON WEST 7 March 1922

Electors 38,216		
Sir R.B. Bird (Coalition Con)	16,790	54.9%
A.G. Walkden (Lab)	<u>13,799</u>	<u>45.1%</u>
	2,991	9.8%
Turnout 80.0%		

3. 1922 GENERAL ELECTION

DUDLEY

Electors 25,923		
C.E. Lloyd (Con)	12,876	60.2%
J. Wilson (Lab)	<u>8,522</u>	<u>39.8%</u>
	4,354	20.4%
Turnout 82.5%		

KINGSWINFORD (STAFFS.)

Electors 39,306		
C.H. Sitch (Lab)	15,232	51.6%
G.H. Beyfus (Lib)	<u>14,313</u>	<u>48.4%</u>
	919	3.2%
Turnout 75.2%		



SMETHWICK

Electors 34,132

J.E. Davison (Lab) 13,141 50.7%

A.H.A. Simcox (Con) 12,759 49.3%  
382 1.4%

Turnout 75.9%

STOURBRIDGE (WORCS.)

Electors 46,346

D.P. Pielou (Con) 18,200 51.8%

J.W. Wilson (Lab) 16,949 48.2%  
1,251 3.6%

Turnout 75.8%

WALSALL

Electors 45,009

P. Collins (Lib) 14,674 38.6%

Lady Cooper (Con) 14,349 37.8%

R. Dennison (Lab) 8,946 23.6%  
325 0.8%

Turnout 84.4%

WEDNESBURY

Electors 37,501

A. Short (Lab) 16,087 50.2%

H.G. Williams (Con) 15,982 49.8%  
105 0.4%

Turnout 85.5%

WEST BROMWICH

F.O. Roberts (Lab) 14,210 50.6%

H.E. Parkes (Con) 11,263 40.1%

A.J.G. Edwards (Lib) 2,622 9.3%  
2,947 10.5%

Turnout 85.7%

WOLVERHAMPTON BILSTON

C.K. Howard-Bury (Con) 12,297 54.2%

J. Baker (Lab) 10,392 45.8%  
1,905 8.4%

Turnout 73.8%

WOLVERHAMPTON EAST

Electors 31,381

G.R. Thorne (Lib) 11,577 45.9%

C.H. Pinson (Con) 9,410 37.3%

W.T.A. Foot (Lab) 3,076 12.2%

Rev. J.A. Shaw (National Liberal) 1,169 4.6%  
2,167 8.6%

Turnout 80.4%

WOLVERHAMPTON WEST

Electors 39,449

R.B. Bird (Con) 17,738 53.9%

A.G. Walkden (Lab) 15,190 46.1%  
2,548 7.8%

Turnout 83.5%

#### 4. 1923 GENERAL ELECTION

##### DUDLEY

Electors 26,257

C.E. Lloyd (Con) 10,227 60.2%

F.J. Ballard (Lib) 8,510 41.1%

R.F. Smith (Lab) 1,958 9.5%

1,718 8.3%

Turnout 78.8%

##### KINGSWINFORD (STAFFS.)

Electors 40,045

C.H. Sitch (Lab) 15,174 49.5%

W.H. Webb (Con) 10,862 35.4%

C.P. Blackwell (Lib) 4,633 15.1%

4,312 14.1%

Turnout 76.6%

##### SMETHWICK

Electors 34,556

J.E. Davison (Lab) 13,550 54.7%

C.E.R. Brocklebank (Con) 11,217 45.3%

2,333 9.4%

Turnout 71.7%

##### STOURBRIDGE (WORCS.)

Electors 47,241

D.P. Pielou (Con) 14,764 39.8%

H.E. Palfrey (Lib) 13,269 35.8%

W. Wellock (Lab) 9,050 24.4%

1,495 4.0%

Turnout 78.5%

##### WALSALL

Electors 45,339

P. Collins (Lib) 16,304 43.5%

S.K. Lewis (Con) 14,141 37.8%

A.C. Osburn (Lab) 7,007 18.7%

2,163 5.7%

Turnout 82.6%

##### WEDNESBURY

Electors 39,024

A. Short (Lab) 17,810 51.5%

H.G. Williams (Con) 16,791 48.5%

1,019 3.0%

Turnout 88.7%

##### WEST BROMWICH

Electors 33,898

F.O. Roberts (Lab) 12,910 44.8%

H.E. Parkes (Con) 11,146 38.7%

A.J.G. Edwards (Lib) 4,749 16.5%

1,764 6.1%

Turnout 85.0%



WOLVERHAMTON BILSTON

Electors 32,670  
C.K. Howard-Bury (Con) 10,186 41.6%  
J. Baker (Lab) 9,085 37.1%  
J. Prentice (Lib) 5,205 21.3%  
1,101 4.5%  
Turnout 74.9%

WOLVERHAMPTON EAST

G.R. Thorne (Lib) was returned unopposed.

WOLVERHAMPTON WEST

Electors 39,941  
Sir R.B. Bird (Con) 15,990 50.4%  
W.J. Brown (Lab) 15,749 49.6%  
241 0.8%  
Turnout 79.5%

4. 1924 GENRAL ELECTION

DUDLEY

Electors 28,826  
C.E. Lloyd (Con) 11,199 52.1%  
O.R. Baldwin (Lab) 10,314 47.9%  
885 4.2%  
Turnout 80.2%

KINGSWINFORD (STAFFS.)

Electors 40,470  
C.H. Sitch (Lab) 17,235 51.5%  
W.H. Webb (Con) 16,208 48.5%  
1,027 3.0%  
Turnout 82.6%

SMETHWICK

Electors 35,443  
J.E. Davison (Lab) 14,491 52.3%  
M.J. Pike (Con) 13,238 47.7%  
1,253 4.6%  
Turnout 78.2%

STOURBRIDGE (WORCS.)

Electors 48,466  
D.P. Pielou (Con) 16,023 39.5%  
W. Wellock (Lab) 14,113 34.8%  
G.Le M. Mander (Lib) 10,418 25.7%  
1,910 4.7%  
Turnout 83.7%

WALSALL

Electors 46,407  
W. Preston (Con) 15,168 37.9%  
P. Collins (Lib) 12,734 31.8%  
G.L.R. Small (Lab) 11,474 28.7%  
Dr. J.J. Lynch (Ind) 622 1.6%  
2,434 6.1%  
Turnout 86.2%

WEDNESBURY

Electors 40,035

A. Short (Lab)	18,170	50.5%
B.G. Lampard-Vachell (Con)	<u>17,832</u>	<u>49.5%</u>
	338	1.0%

Turnout 89.9%

WEST BROMWICH

Electors 34,503

F.O. Roberts (Lab)	15,384	51.6%
H.A.R. Graham (Con)	<u>14,413</u>	<u>48.4%</u>
	971	3.2%

Turnout 86.4%

WOLVERHAMPTON BILSTON

Electors 33,444

J. Baker (Lab)	14,583	53.2%
C.K. Howard-Bury (Con)	<u>12,840</u>	<u>46.8%</u>
	1,743	6.4%

Turnout 82%

WOLVERHAMPTON EAST

Electors 32,602

G.R. Thorne (Lib)	11,066	42.1%
Sir T.G. Strangman (Con)	10,013	38.1%
D.R. Williams (Lab)	<u>5,188</u>	<u>19.8%</u>
	1,053	4.0%

Turnout 80.6%

WOLVERHAMPTON WEST

Electors 40,677

Sir R.B. Bird (Con)	17,886	51.2%
W.J. Brown (Lab)	<u>17,046</u>	<u>48.8%</u>
	840	2.4%

Turnout 85.9%

6. BY-ELECTIONS 1924-1929

WALSALL 27 February 1925

Electors 46,407

W. Preston (Con)	14,793	38.2%
T.J. MacNamara (Lib)	12,300	31.8%
G.L.R. Small (Lab)	<u>11,610</u>	<u>30.0%</u>
	2,493	6.4%

Turnout 83.4%

SMETHWICK 21 December 1926

Electors 35,862

O.E. Mosley (Lab)	16,077	57.1%
M.J. Pike (Con)	9,495	33.7%
E. Bayliss (Lib)	<u>2,600</u>	<u>9.2%</u>
	6,582	23.4%

Turnout 78.6%



STOURBRIDGE (WORCS.)

Electors 49,587

W. Wellock (Lab)	16,561	41.9%
H.C. Hogbin (Con)	13,462	34.0%
A.J.G. Edwards (Lib)	<u>9,535</u>	<u>24.1%</u>
	3,099	7.9%

Turnout 79.8%

7. 1929 GENERAL ELECTION

DUDLEY

Electors 34,883

O.R. Baldwin (Lab)	13,551	47.6%
C.E. Lloyd (Con)	10,508	36.9%
T.I. Clough (Lib)	<u>4,399</u>	<u>15.5%</u>
	3,043	10.7%

Turnout 81.6%

KINGSWINFORD (STAFFS.)

Electors 53,530

C.H. Sitch (Lab)	22,479	53.2%
S.E. Garcke (Con)	12,151	28.7%
A.W. Bowkett (Lib)	<u>7,639</u>	<u>18.1%</u>
	10,328	24.5%

Turnout 79.0%

SMETHWICK

Electors 45,222

Sir O.E. Mosley (Lab)	19,550	54.8%
A.R. Wise (Con)	12,210	34.2%
Miss M.E. Marshall (Lib)	<u>3,909</u>	<u>11.0%</u>
	7,340	20.6%

Turnout 78.9%

STOURBRIDGE (WORCS.)

Electors 66,145

W. Wellock (Lab)	21,343	38.4%
Sir H.S. Reed (Con)	17,675	31.8%
D.L. Finnemore (Lib)	<u>16,537</u>	<u>29.8%</u>
	3,668	6.6%

Turnout 84%

WALSALL

Electors 60,233

J.J. McShane (Lab)	20,524	39.6%
W. Preston (Con)	15,818	30.6%
T.J. MacNamara (Lib)	<u>15,425</u>	<u>29.8%</u>
	4,706	9.0%

Turnout 85.9%

WEDNESBURY

Electors 49,971

A. Short (Lab)	22,420	50.1%
H. Rubin (Con)	17,089	38.1%
J.H. Stockdale (Lib)	5,249	11.7%
T. Gee (Ind)	<u>61</u>	<u>0.1%</u>
	5,331	12.0%

Turnout 89.7%

WEST BROMWICH

Electors 45,371

F.O .Roberts (Lab)	19,621	52.1%
J.I. Chesshire (Con)	10,943	29.0%
W. Ramage (Lib)	<u>7,119</u>	<u>18.9%</u>
	8,678	23.1%

Turnout 83.1%

WOLVERHAMPTON BILSTON

Electors 43,093

J. Baker (Lab)	18,679	50.7%
S.J. Thompson (Con)	13,635	37.1%
G. Salter (Lib)	<u>4,475</u>	<u>12.2%</u>
	5,044	13.6%

Turnout 85.4%

WOLVERHAMPTON EAST

Electors 42,222

G.M. Mander (Lib)	15,391	44.8%
P.G.T. Buchan-Hepburn (Con)	10,163	29.5%
D.R. Williams (Lab)	<u>8,840</u>	<u>25.7%</u>
	5,228	15.3%

Turnout 81.5%

WOLVERHAMPTON WEST

Electors 51,061

W.J. Brown (Lab)	21,103	49.1%
Sir R.B. Brown (Con)	17,237	40.2%
G.H. Roberts (Lib)	<u>4,580</u>	<u>10.7%</u>
	3,866	8.9%

Turnout 84.1%

8 1931 GENERAL ELECTION

DUDLEY

Electors 34,818

D.J.B. Joel (Con)	16,009	56.9%
W. Hadgkiss (Lab)	<u>12,105</u>	<u>43.1%</u>
	3,904	13.6%

Turnout 80.7%

KINGSWINFORD (STAFFS.)

Electors 55,138

A.L.S. Todd (Con)	21,934	52.9%
C.H. Sitch (Lab)	<u>19,495</u>	<u>47.1%</u>
	2,439	5.8%

Turnout 75.1%



SMETHWICK

Electors 46,671

A.R. Wise (Con) 20,945 60.1%

W.E. Lawrence (Lab) 13,927 39.9%  
7,018 20.2%

Turnout 74.7%

STOURBRIDGE (WORCS.)

Electors 70,324

R.H. Morgan (Con) 22,652 39.3%

W. Wellock (Lab) 18,910 32.8%

D.L. Finnemore (Lib) 16,121 27.9%  
3,742 6.5%

Turnout 82.0%

WALSALL

Electors 63,110

J.A. Leckie (National Lib) 30,507 56.0%

J.J. McShane (Lab) 23,952 44.0%  
6,555 12.0%

Turnout 86.3%

WEDNESBURY

Electors 51,498

Viscount Ednam (Con) 25,000 54.5%

A. Short (Lab) 20,842 45.5%  
4,158 9.0%

Turnout 89.0%

WEST BROMWICH

Electors 47,492

A. Ramsay (Con) 17,729 45.7%

F.O. Roberts (Lab) 17,204 44.4%

W. Ramage (Lib) 3,851 9.9%  
525 1.3%

Turnout 81.7%

WOLVERHAMPTON BILSTON

Electors 46,045

G.K. Peto (Con) 20,620 55.0%

J. Baker (Lab) 16,847 45.0%  
3,773 10.0%

Turnout 81.4%

WOLVERHAMPTON EAST

Electors 43,162

G.M. Mander (Lib) 14,945 44.1%

A.T. Waters-Taylor (Con) 12,628 37.2%

J. Smith (Lab) 6,340 18.7%  
2,317 6.9%

Turnout 78.6%

WOLVERHAMPTON WEST

Electors 51,355

Sir R.B. Bird (Con) 26,181 60.5%

W.J. Brown (Ind Lab) 17,090 39.5%  
9,091 21.0%

Turnout 84.3%

## 9. BY-ELECTIONS 1931-35

### WEDNESBURY 26 July 1932

Electors 51,498

J.W. Banfield (Lab)	21,977	54.7%
R.G. Davis (Con)	<u>18,198</u>	<u>45.3%</u>
	3,779	9.4%

Turnout 78.0%

## 10. 1935 GENERAL ELECTION

### DUDLEY

Electors 33,823

D.J.B. Joel (Con)	13,958	54.8%
W.W. Benn (Lab)	<u>11,509</u>	<u>45.2%</u>
	2,449	9.6%

Turnout 75.3%

### KINGSWINFORD (STAFFS.)

Electors 58,490

A. Henderson (Lab)	20,925	50.0%
A.L.S. Todd (Con)	<u>20,909</u>	<u>50.0%</u>
	16	0.0%

Turnout 71.5%

### SMETHWICK

Electors 44,695

A.R. Wise (Con)	16,575	52.5%
Dr. C.W. Brock (Lab)	<u>15,023</u>	<u>47.5%</u>
	1,552	5.0%

Turnout 70.7%

### STOURBRIDGE (WORCS.)

Electors 80,598

R.H. Morgan (Con)	24,898	39.3%
W. Wellock (Lab)	19,597	32.8%
D.L. Finnemore (Lib)	<u>12,684</u>	<u>22.2%</u>
	5,301	9.2%

Turnout 70.9%

### WALSALL

Electors 65,957

J.A. Leckie (National Lib)	28,563	57.5%
W. Graham (Lab)	19,594	39.5%
J.W. Harper (Ind)	<u>1,480</u>	<u>3.0%</u>
	8,969	18.0%

Turnout 75.3%

### WEDNESBURY

Electors 54,500

J.W. Banfield (Lab)	22,683	53.3%
Rev. H. Dunston (National Lib)	<u>19,883</u>	<u>46.7%</u>
	2,800	6.6%

Turnout 78.1%



WEST BROMWICH

Electors 49,848		
F.O. Roberts (Lab)	19,113	51.3%
R. Ashton (Con)	<u>18,175</u>	<u>48.7%</u>
	938	2.6%
Turnout 74.8%		

WOLVERHAMPTON BILSTON

Electors 51,528		
I.C. Hannah (Con)	18,689	51.2%
D.L. Mort (Lab)	<u>17,820</u>	<u>48.8%</u>
	869	2.4%
Turnout 70.9%		

WOLVERHAMPTON EAST

Electors 44,817		
G.M. Mander (Lib)	15,935	48.5%
J.L. Brockhouse (Con)	11,935	36.3%
H.E. Lane (Lab)	<u>4,985</u>	<u>15.2%</u>
	4,000	12.2%
Turnout 73.3%		

WOLVERHAMPTON WEST

Electors 49,537		
Sir R.B. Bird (Con)	19,697	54.9%
W.J. Brown (ILA)	14,867	41.4%
Rev. R. Lee (Lab)	<u>1,325</u>	<u>3.7%</u>
	4,830	13.5%
Turnout 72.4%		

11. BY-ELECTIONS 1935-39

WALSALL 16 November 1938

Electors 66,226		
Sir G.E. Schuster (National Lib)	30,507	56.0%
G. Jeger (Lab)	<u>21,562</u>	<u>42.9%</u>
	7,158	14.2%
Turnout 75.9%		

**TABLE B. TOTAL LABOUR VOTE AND ITS PERCENTAGE OF THE WHOLE VOTE IN  
GENERAL ELECTIONS IN THE BLACK COUNTRY**

GENERAL ELECTION	NUMBER OF LABOUR CANDIDATES	TOTAL LABOUR VOTE	LABOUR % OF THE TOTAL VOTE IN CONTESTED SEATS
1918	9	81,570	42.8%
1922	9	104,796	41.0%
1923	9	102,293	37.8%
1924	10	137,998	43.3%
1929	10	188,110	45.8%
1931	10*	166,712	40.1%
1935	11*	167,441	42.8%

\* Includes ILA candidate in Wolverhampton West



TABLE C. GENERAL ELECTION RESULTS IN BIRMINGHAM BETWEEN THE WARS

1. 1918 GENERAL ELECTION

ASTON

Electors	35,443		
E. Cecil (Coalition Con)	9,997	62.4%	
J.W. Banfield (Lab)	4,451	27.8%	
J.H. Dooley (Discharged Soldier)	<u>1,561</u>	<u>9.8%</u>	
	5,546	34.6%	
Turnout	45.2%		

DERITEND

Electors	37,442		
J.W. Dennis (Coalition Con)	9,495	82.7%	
A. Brampton (Lib)	<u>1,990</u>	<u>17.3%</u>	
	7,505	65.4%	
Turnout	30.7%		

DUDMASTON

Electors	34,167		
E. Hallas (Coalition NDP)	8,796	79.4%	
Dr J.F. Crowley (Lib)	<u>2,280</u>	<u>20.6%</u>	
	6,516	58.8%	
Turnout	32.4%		

EDGBASTON

Electors	37,013		
Sir F.W. Lowe (Coalition Con)	13,565	76.4%	
Sir J. Barnsley (Lib)	<u>4,184</u>	<u>23.6%</u>	
	9,381	52.8%	
Turnout	48.0%		

ERDINGTON

Electors	34,239		
Sir A.H.D.R. Steel-Maitland (Coalition Con)	12,678	66.0%	
A.E. Eyton (Ind Lab)	5,211	27.1%	
R.H.E.H. Somerset (Lib)	<u>1,329</u>	<u>6.9%</u>	
	7,467	38.9%	
Turnout	56.1%		

HANDSWORTH

Electors	37,254		
E.C Meysey-Thompson (Coalition Con)	12,019	56.4%	
N. Tiptaft (Ind)	4,697	22.1%	
H.J. Odell (Ind Lab)	<u>4,576</u>	<u>21.5%</u>	
	7,322	34.3%	
Turnout	57.2%		

KING'S NORTON

Electors	27,117		
Sir H. Austin (Coalition Con)	8,809	54.5%	
T. Hackett (Co-op)	4,917	30.4%	
W.N. Birkett (Lib)	<u>2,435</u>	<u>15.1%</u>	
	3,892	24.1%	
Turnout	59.6%		

LADYWOOD

Electors 33,330		
A.N. Chamberlain (Coalition Con)	9,405	69.5%
J.W. Kneeshaw (Lab)	2,572	19.0%
Mrs M.I.C. Ashby (Lib)	<u>1,552</u>	<u>11.5%</u>
	6,833	50.5%
Turnout 40.6%		

MOSELEY

Electors 41,546		
Sir H. Rogers (Coalition Con)	16,161	69.2%
Dr. R. Dunstan (Lab)	3,789	16.2%
W .Hill (Lib)	<u>3,422</u>	<u>14.6%</u>
	12,372	53.0%
Turnout 56.3%		

SPARKBROOK

Electors 37,123		
L.C.M.S. Amery (Coalition Con)	15,225	78.1%
F. Spires (Co-op)	3,014	15.5%
J.G. Hurst (Lib)	<u>1,251</u>	<u>6.4%</u>
	12,211	62.6%
Turnout 52.5%		

WEST BIRMINGHAM

J.A. Chamberlain (Coalition Con) unopposed

YARDLEY

Electors 36,575		
A.R. Jephcott (Coalition Con)	10,960	56.3%
G. Shann (Lab)	7,466	38.3%
G. Jackson (Lib)	<u>1,049</u>	<u>5.4%</u>
	3,494	18.0%
Turnout 53.2%		

2. 1922 GENERAL ELECTION

ASTON

Electors 36,113		
Sir E.Cecil (Con)	15,913	60.8%
J.P. Cotter (Lab)	<u>10,279</u>	<u>39.2%</u>
	5,634	21.6%
Turnout 72.5%		

DERITEND

Electors 36,985		
J.S. Crooke (Con)	11,700	48.9%
F. Longden (Lab)	6,892	28.8%
H. Willison (Lib)	<u>5,331</u>	<u>22.3%</u>
	4,808	20.1%
Turnout 64.7%		

DUDDESTON

Electors 34,388		
Sir E.V. Hiley (Con)	13,091	61.1%
M. Brothers (Lab)	<u>8,331</u>	<u>38.9%</u>
	4,760	22.2%
Turnout 62.3%		



EDGBASTON

Sir F.W. Lowe (Con) unopposed

ERDINGTON

Sir A.H.D.R. Steel-Maitland (Con) unopposed

HANDSWORTH

Electors 38,164

O.S. Locker-Lampson (Con)	18,859	59.6%
N. Tiptaft (Ind)	<u>12,790</u>	<u>40.4%</u>
	6,069	19.2%

Turnout 82.9%

KING'S NORTON

Electors 28,857

Sir H. Austin (Con)	8,870	41.6%
Mrs E. Barton (Lab/Co-op)	7,017	32.8%
W. Meakin (Lib)	<u>5,474</u>	<u>25.6%</u>
	1,853	8.8%

Turnout 74.0%

LADYWOOD

Electors 33,508

A.N. Chamberlain (Con)	13,032	55.2%
Dr R. Dunstan (Lab)	<u>10,589</u>	<u>44.8%</u>
	2,443	10.4%

Turnout 70.5%

MOSELEY

P.J.H. Hannon (Con) unopposed

Hanson returned unopposed in a by-election 4/3/1921

SPARKBROOK

Electors 37,918

L.C.M.S. Amery (Con)	13,326	49.5%
T.F. Duggan (Lib)	7,283	27.1%
E.W. Hampton (Lab/Co-op)	<u>6,310</u>	<u>23.4%</u>
	6,043	22.4%

Turnout 71.0%

WEST BIRMINGHAM

Electors 37,263

J.A. Chamberlain (Con)	15,405	61.6%
F. Smith (Lab)	<u>9,599</u>	<u>38.4%</u>
	5,806	23.2%

Turnout 67.1%

YARDLEY

Electors 38,045

A.R. Jephcott (Con)	15,586	58.1%
A.G. Gosling (Lab)	<u>11,234</u>	<u>41.9%</u>
	4,352	16.2%

Turnout 70.5%

### 3. 1923 GENERAL ELECTION

#### ASTON

Electors 36,416

Sir E. Cecil (Con)	13,291	56.2%
P. Bower (Lab)	7,541	31.8%
J.C. Tillotson (Lib)	<u>2,846</u>	<u>12.0%</u>
	5,750	24.4%

Turnout 65.0%

#### DERITEND

Electors 37,671

J.S. Crooke (Con)	12,015	56.1%
F. Longden (Lab)	<u>9,396</u>	<u>43.9%</u>
	2,619	12.2%

Turnout 56.8%

#### DUDDESTON

Electors 34,553

J.B. Burman (Con)	11,712	59.6%
G.F. Sawyer (Lab)	7,309	37.2%
A. Ford (Ind)	<u>634</u>	<u>3.2%</u>
	4,403	22.4%

Turnout 56.9%

#### EDGBASTON

Electors 37,779

Sir F.W. Lowe (Con)	15,459	72.2%
A.W. Bowkett (Lib)	<u>5,962</u>	<u>27.8%</u>
	9,497	44.4%

Turnout 56.7%

#### ERDINGTON

Electors 37,450

Sir A.H.D.R. Maitland (Con)	14,683	66.0%
A.E. Eyton (Lab)	<u>7,574</u>	<u>34.0%</u>
	7,109	32.0%

Turnout 59.4%

#### HANDSWORTH

O.S. Locker-Lampson (Con) unopposed

#### KING'S NORTON

Electors 29,652

Sir H. Austin (Con)	9,545	43.4%
Mrs E. Barton (Lab/Co-op)	6,743	30.7%
Mrs E.M. Cadbury (Lib)	<u>5,686</u>	<u>25.9%</u>
	2,802	12.7%

Turnout 74.1%

#### LADYWOOD

Electors 33,652

A.N. Chamberlain (Con)	12,884	53.2%
Dr R. Dunstan (Lab)	<u>11,330</u>	<u>46.8%</u>
	1,554	6.4%

Turnout 72.0%



MOSELEY

Electors 43,642

P.J.H. Hannon (Con)	19,628	71.3%
Mrs J. Clarkson (Lib)	<u>7,904</u>	<u>28.7%</u>
	11,724	42.6%

Turnout 63.1%

SPARKBROOK

Electors 37,890

L.C.M.S. Amery (Con)	13,523	56.0%
E.W. Hampton (Lab)	5,948	24.6%
D.L. Finnemore (Lib)	<u>4,676</u>	<u>19.4%</u>
	7,575	31.4%

Turnout 63.7%

WEST BIRMINGHAM

Electors 37,433

J.A. Chamberlain (Con)	16,862	58.3%
F. Smith (Lab)	<u>9,983</u>	<u>41.7%</u>
	3,957	16.6%

Turnout 63.9%

YARDLEY

Electors 38,591

A.R. Jephcott (Con)	13,300	53.5%
A.G. Gossling (Lab)	<u>11,562</u>	<u>46.5%</u>
	1,738	7.0%

Turnout 64.4%

4. 1924 GENERAL ELECTIONASTON

Electors 36,391

Sir E. Cecil (Con)	14,244	54.6%
E.J.St.L. Strachey (Lab)	<u>11,859</u>	<u>45.4%</u>
	2,385	9.2%

Turnout 71.7%

DERITEND

Electors 37,980

J.S. Crooke (Con)	13,552	51.5%
F. Longden (Lab/Co-op)	<u>12,760</u>	<u>48.5%</u>
	792	3.0%

Turnout 69.3%

DUDESTON

Electors 34,673

J.B. Burman (Con)	11,407	51.2%
G.F. Sawyer (Lab)	<u>10,892</u>	<u>48.8%</u>
	515	2.4%

Turnout 64.3%

EDGBASTON

Electors 37,874

Sir F.W. Lowe (Con)	18,822	76.6%
F.R. Sharkey (Lab)	<u>5,744</u>	<u>23.4%</u>
	13,078	53.2%

Turnout 64.9%

ERDINGTON

Electors 38,864

Sir A.H.D.R. Steel-Maitland (Con)	16,754	59.5%
C.J. Simmons (Lab)	<u>11,412</u>	<u>40.5%</u>
	5,342	19.0%

Turnout 72.5%

HANDSWORTH

Electors 38,872

O.S. Locker-Lampson (Con)	20,056	65.6%
P.J. Noel-Baker (Lab)	<u>10,516</u>	<u>34.4%</u>
	9,540	31.2%

Turnout 78.6%

KING'S NORTON

Electors 30,034

R. Dennison (Lab)	10,497	43.3%
Sir H. Austin (Con)	10,364	42.8%
J. Fryer (Lib)	<u>3,370</u>	<u>13.9%</u>
	133	0.5%

Turnout 80.7%

LADYWOOD

Electors 33,787

A.N. Chamberlain (Con)	13,374	49.1%
O.E. Mosley (Lab)	13,297	48.9%
A.W. Bowkett (Lib)	<u>539</u>	<u>2.0%</u>
	77	0.2%

Turnout 80.5%

MOSELEY

Electors 44,876

P.J.H. Hannon (Con)	24,333	77.2%
G.P. Blizzard (Lab)	<u>7,183</u>	<u>22.8%</u>
	17,150	54.4%

Turnout 70.2%

SPARKBROOK

Electors 38,058

L.C.M.S. Amery (Con)	15,718	58.1%
S.B.M. Potter (Lab)	9,759	36.1%
E.P. Ray (Lib)	<u>1,580</u>	<u>5.8%</u>
	5,959	22.0%

Turnout 71.1%

WEST BIRMINGHAM

Electors 37,754

J.A. Chamberlain (Con)	14,801	67.4%
Dr R. Dunstan (Com)	<u>7,158</u>	<u>32.6%</u>
	7,643	34.8%

Turnout 58.2%

YARDLEY

Electors 39,235

A.R. Jephcott (Con)	16,149	53.2%
A.G. Gossling (Lab)	<u>14,184</u>	<u>46.8%</u>
	1,965	6.4%

Turnout 77.3%



## 5. 1929 GENERAL ELECTION

### ASTON

Electors 45,687

E.J.St.L. Strachey (Lab)	18,672	52.2%
J.P. Whiteley (Con)	<u>17,114</u>	<u>47.8%</u>
	1,558	4.4%

Turnout 78.3%

### DERITEND

Electors 47,262

F. Longden (Lab/Co-op)	16,932	50.7%
J.S. Crooke (Con)	14,165	42.5%
Mrs B. Hornabrook (Lib)	<u>2,268</u>	<u>6.8%</u>
	2,767	8.2%

Turnout 70.6%

### DUDESTON

Electors 43,507

G.F. Sawyer (Lab)	18,204	61.0%
J.B. Burman (Con)	<u>11,639</u>	<u>39.0%</u>
	6,565	22.0%

Turnout 68.6%

### EDGBASTON

Electors 52,366

A.N. Chamberlain (Con)	23,350	63.7%
W.H.D. Caple (Lab)	8,590	23.4%
P.R.C. Young (Lib)	<u>4,720</u>	<u>12.9%</u>
	14,760	40.3%

Turnout 70.0%

### ERDINGTON

Electors 60,472

C.J. Simmons (Lab)	20,665	43.5%
Sir A.H.D.R. Steel-Maitland (Con)	20,532	43.1%
H.J.H. Dyer (Lib)	<u>6,395</u>	<u>13.4%</u>
	133	0.4%

Turnout 78.7%

### HANDSWORTH

Electors 52,025

O.S. Locker-Lampson (Con)	22,035	53.9%
L.A. Fenn (Lab)	11,959	29.3%
A.G. Bagnall (Lib)	<u>6,857</u>	<u>16.8%</u>
	10,076	24.6%

Turnout 78.5%

### KING'S NORTON

Electors 41,602

L. Beaumont-Thomas (Con)	14,465	42.0%
R. Dennison (Lab)	13,937	40.6%
A.P. Marshall (Lib)	<u>5,998</u>	<u>17.4%</u>
	491	17.4%

Turnout 82.8%

LADYWOOD

Electors 42,590

W. Whiteley (Lab)	16,447	50.0%
G.W. Lloyd (Con)	<u>16,436</u>	<u>50.0%</u>
	11	0.0%

Turnout 77.2%

MOSELEY

Electors 81,506

P.J.H. Hannon (Con)	33,820	56.8%
Dr F.G. Bushnell (Lab)	15,733	26.4%
A.M. Meek (Lib)	9,388	15.7%
G. Brigden (Ind Lab)	<u>675</u>	<u>1.1%</u>
	18,087	30.4%

SPARKBROOK

Electors 47,041

L.C.M.S. Amery (Con)	15,867	46.2%
A. Young (Lab)	12,875	37.4%
T.F. Duggan (Lib)	<u>5,645</u>	<u>16.4%</u>
	2,992	8.8%

Turnout 73.1%

WEST BIRMINGHAM

Electors 45,593

Sir J.A. Chamberlain (Con)	16,862	50.1%
O.G. Willey (Lab)	<u>16,819</u>	<u>49.9%</u>
	43	0.2%

Turnout 73.9%

YARDLEY

Electors 63,068

A.G. Gossling (Lab)	23,956	48.9%
E.W. Salt (Con)	19,590	38.9%
C.A. Beaumont (Lib)	<u>5,500</u>	<u>11.2%</u>
	4,366	9.0%

Turnout 77.8%

6. 1931 GENERAL ELECTIONASTON

Electors 44,123

A.O.J. Hope (Con)	22,959	70.8%
T.J. May (Lab)	6,212	19.2%
E.J.St.L. Strachey (Ind)	<u>3,236</u>	<u>10.0%</u>
	16,747	51.6%

Turnout 73.4%

DERITEND

Electors 45,671

J.S. Crooke (Con)	21,684	66.0%
F. Longden (Lab/Co-op)	<u>11,163</u>	<u>34.0%</u>
	10,521	32.0%

Turnout 71.9%



DUDDESTON

Electors 41,492

O.E. Simmonds (Con)	16,332	61.1%
G.F. Sawyer (Lab)	9,789	36.6%
B. Moore (Com)	327	1.2%
J. Williams (NP)	<u>284</u>	<u>1.1%</u>
	6,543	24.5%

Turnout 64.4%

EDGBASTON

Electors 53,955

A.N. Chamberlain (Con)	33,085	86.5%
W.W. Blaylock (Lab)	<u>5,157</u>	<u>13.5%</u>
	27,928	73.0%

Turnout 70.9%

ERDINGTON

Electors 67,448

J.F. Eales (Con)	35,672	68.1%
C.J. Simmons (Lab)	<u>16,676</u>	<u>31.9%</u>
	18,996	36.2%

Turnout 77.6%

HANDSWORTH

Electors 52,660

O.S. Locker-Lampson (Con)	30,989	78.4%
L.A. Fenn (Lab)	<u>8,548</u>	<u>21.6%</u>
	22,441	56.8%

Turnout 75.1%

KINGS NORTON

Electors 47,399

L. Beaumont-Thomas (Con)	22,063	57.5%
G.R. Mitchison (Lab)	11,016	28.7%
A.P. Marshall (Lib)	<u>5,294</u>	<u>13.8%</u>
	11,047	28.8%

LADYWOOD

Electors 41,129

G.W. Lloyd (Con)	23,057	71.8%
W. Whiteley (Lab)	<u>9,057</u>	<u>28.2%</u>
	14,000	43.6%

Turnout 78.1%

MOSELEY

Electors 92,183

P.J.H. Hannon (Con)	53,041	79.8%
F.G. Lloyd (Lab)	<u>13,399</u>	<u>20.2%</u>
	36,642	59.6%

Turnout 72.1%

SPARKBROOK

Electors 46,073

L.C.M.S. Amery (Con)	23,517	73.4%
G. Archibald (Lab)	<u>8,538</u>	<u>26.6%</u>
	14,979	46.8%

Turnout 69.6%

WEST BIRMINGHAM

Electors 43,442

Sir J.A. Chamberlain (Con)	22,448	68.1%
O.G. Willey (Lab)	<u>10,507</u>	<u>31.9%</u>
	11,941	36.2%

Turnout 75.9%

YARDLEY

Electors 64,117

E.W. Salt (Con)	32,061	65.2%
A.G. Gossling (Lab)	16,640	33.8%
E.J. Bartleet (NP)	<u>479</u>	<u>1.0%</u>
	15,421	31.4%

Turnout 76.7%

7. 1935 GENERAL ELECTIONASTON

Electors 42,527

A.O.J. Hope (Con)	18,933	68.8%
R.P. Messel (Lab)	<u>8,578</u>	<u>31.2%</u>
	10,355	37.6%

Turnout 64.7%

DERITEND

Electors 42,078

J.S. Crooke (Con)	14,925	59.5%
F. Longden (Lab/Co-op)	<u>10,144</u>	<u>40.5%</u>
	4,781	19.0%

Turnout 59.6%

DUDDESTON

Electors 39,144

O.E. Simmonds (Con)	12,146	57.8%
G.F. Sawyer (Lab)	<u>8,884</u>	<u>42.2%</u>
	3,262	15.6%

Turnout 53.7%

EDGBASTON

Electors 55,474

A.N. Chamberlain (Con)	28,243	81.6%
J. Adshead (Lab)	<u>6,381</u>	<u>18.4%</u>
	21,862	63.2%

Turnout 62.4%

ERDINGTON

Electors 72,524

J.F. Eales (Con)	27,716	58.3%
C.J. Simmons (Lab)	17,757	37.4%
H.C. Bell (Ind)	<u>2,050</u>	<u>4.3%</u>
	9,959	20.9%

Turnout 63.5%



HANDSWORTH

Electors 53,567

O.S. Locker-Lampson (Con)	24,135	73.0%
A.G. Chattaway (Lab)	<u>8,910</u>	<u>27.0%</u>
	15,225	46.0%

Turnout 61.7%

KING'S NORTON

Electors 57,944

J.R.H. Cartland (Con)	24,559	56.8%
G.R. Mitchison (Lab)	<u>18,684</u>	<u>43.2%</u>
	5,875	13.6%

Turnout 74.6%

LADYWOOD

Electors 39,180

G.W. Lloyd (Con)	18,565	71.7%
G.H. Humphreys (Lab)	<u>7,311</u>	<u>28.3%</u>
	11,254	43.4%

Turnout 66.0%

MOSELEY

Electors 101,169

P.J.H. Hannon (Con)	43,885	71.4%
J. Silverman (Lab)	<u>17,543</u>	<u>28.6%</u>
	26,342	42.8%

Turnout 60.7%

SPARKBROOK

Electors 44,647

L.C.M.S. Amery (Con)	17,509	68.5%
H. Whittaker (Lab)	<u>8,063</u>	<u>31.5%</u>
	9,446	37.0%

Turnout 57.3%

WEST BIRMINGHAM

Electors 40,401

Sir J.A. Chamberlain (Con)	16,530	64.3%
O.G. Willey (Lab)	<u>9,159</u>	<u>35.7%</u>
	7,371	28.6%

Turnout 63.6%

YARDLEY

Electors 68,377

E.W. Salt (Con)	25,717	57.7%
C. Jarman (Lab)	<u>18,879</u>	<u>42.3%</u>
	6,838	15.4%

Turnout 65.2%

8. BY-ELECTIONS 1935-9ERDINGTON 20 October 1936

Electors 74,038

J.A.C. Wright (Con)	27,068	56.5%
C.J. Simmons (Lab)	<u>20,834</u>	<u>43.5%</u>
	6,234	13.0%

Turnout 64.7%

WEST BIRMINGHAM 29 April 1937

Electors	39,600		
W.F. Higgs (Con)	12,552	56.6%	
R.H.S. Crossman (Lab)	<u>9,632</u>	<u>43.4%</u>	
	2,920	13.2%	
Turnout	56.0%		

ASTON 17 May 1939

Electors	40,308		
E.O. Kellett (Con)	12,023	66.3%	
Dr S. Segal (Lab)	<u>6,122</u>	<u>33.7%</u>	
	5,901	32.6%	
Turnout	45.0%		



**TABLE D. TOTAL LABOUR VOTE AND ITS PERCENTAGE OF THE WHOLE VOTE IN  
GENERAL ELECTIONS IN BIRMINGHAM**

GENERAL ELECTIONS	NUMBER OF LABOUR CANDIDATES	TOTAL LABOUR VOTE	LABOUR % OF THE TOTAL VOTE IN CONTESTED SEATS
1918	9*	35,996	24.5%
1922	8	70,251	36.0%
1923	9	77,386	37.0%
1924	11	118,103	39.6%
1929	13#	195,500	41.8%
1931	12	126,702	26.8%
1935	12	140,293	33.8%

- Includes Independent Labour and Co-op candidates.
  - # Includes Independent Labour candidate at Moseley.
- Communist candidates not included with Labour vote.

TABLE E. MUNICIPAL ELECTION RESULTS 1919-381919DUDLEY

3 Seats contested

Labour won 2, gaining 2 from Progressives / Coalition

SMETHWICK

4 Seats contested

2 No Change

Labour won 2, gaining 1 from Independents

Independents gained 1.

WALSALL

4 Seats contested

3 No Change

Labour won 1, gaining 1 from Conservatives.

WEDNESBURY

4 Seats contested

3 No Change

Labour won 2 gaining 1.

WEST BROMWICH

7 Seats contested

5 No Change

Labour won 1, gaining 1

Independents gained 1.

WOLVERHAMPTON

8 Seats contested

3 No Change

Labour won 3, gaining 1 from Liberals 1 from Conservatives and 1 from Independents,  
Progressives gained 2 from Conservatives.Birmingham Gazette 3 November 1919.1920DUDLEY

6 Seats contested

3 No Change

Labour gained 2 from Liberals

Liberals gained 1 from Labour.

SMETHWICK

4 Seats contested

2 No Change

Labour gained 1 from Coalition Unionists

Coalition Unionists gained 1 from Labour.

STOURBRIDGE

6 Seats contested

No Change – Independents retain all seats from Labour.



WALSALL

6 Seats contested

4 No Change

Labour gained 2 seats from Conservatives.

WEDNESBURY

4 Seats contested

2 No Change

Conservatives gained 2 from Labour.

WEST BROMWICH

2 Seats contested

Labour gained 2 seats from Independents.

WOLVERHAMPTON

8 Seats contested

4 No Change

Labour gained 2 from Liberal and Conservative

Liberals gained 1 from Labour

Independents gained 1 from Labour.

Birmingham Gazette 2 November 1920.1921DUDLEY

8 Seats contested

3 No Change

Labour won 2, gaining 2 from Independents

Independents gained 2

Conservatives gained 1

SMETHWICK

6 Seats contested

2 No Change

Labour won 4, gaining 3 from Coalition

Coalition gained 1 from Labour

STOURBRIDGE

6 Seats contested

4 No Change

Labour won 0

Independents gained 2

WALSALL

6 Seats contested

4 No Change

Labour won 2

Unemployed Association gained 1

Anti-Waste gained 1

WEDNESBURY

3 Seats contested

2 No Change

Labour won 1

Conservatives gained 1 from Labour

WEST BROMWICH

4 Seats contested  
 2 No Change  
 Labour won 2  
 Independents gained 1  
 Liberals gained 1

WOLVERHAMPTON

5 Seats contested  
 1 No Change  
 Labour won 4, gaining 3  
 Independents gained 1 from the Conservatives

Birmingham Gazette 2 November 1921  
1922

DUDLEY

6 Seats contested  
 Labour won 1  
 4 No Change  
 Independents gained 1 from Labour  
 Conservatives gained 1 from Labour

SMETHWICK

6 Seats contested  
 6 No Change  
 Labour won 3

STOURBRIDGE

6 Seats contested  
 4 No Change  
 Labour won 1  
 Independents gained 2 from Labour

WALSALL

5 Seats contested  
 2 No Change  
 Labour won 0  
 Ratepayer Coalition gained 2 from Labour  
 Independents gained 1 from Labour

WEDNESBURY

3 Seats contested  
 Labour won 0  
 Conservatives gained 3 from Labour

WEST BROMWICH

1 Seat contested  
 1 No Change  
 Labour won 1

WOLVERHAMPTON

8 Seats contested  
 6 No Change  
 Labour won 2  
 Conservatives gained 2 from Labour and Independents

Birmingham Gazette 2 November 1922.



1923DUDLEY

5 Seats contested

3 No Change

Labour won 1

Conservatives gained 2 from Labour

SMETHWICK

6 Seats contested

5 No Change

Labour won 3

Conservatives gained 1 from Labour

STOURBRIDGE

6 Seats contested

6 No Change

Labour won 1

WALSALL

3 Seats contested

2 No Change

Labour won 1

Ratepayers gained 1 from Labour

WEDNESBURY

4 Seats contested

4 No Change

Labour won 1

WEST BROMWICH

3 Seats contested

2 No Change

Independents gained 1 from Labour

WOLVERHAMPTON

7 Seats contested

6 No Change

Labour won 2 seats, gaining 1

Birmingham Gazette 2 November 1923.

1924DUDLEY

3 Seats contested

2 No Change

Labour won 0

Liberals gained 1 from Conservatives

SMETHWICK

5 Seats contested

2 No Change

Labour won 2, gaining 1 from Conservatives

Conservatives gained 2 from Labour

WALSALL

3 Seats contested

2 No Change

Labour won 0

Conservatives gained 1 from Labour

WEDNESBURY

2 Seats contested

2 No Change

WEST BROMWICH

3 Seats contested

2 No Change

Labour won 1, gaining 1 from Independents

WOLVERHAMPTON

4 Seats contested

1 No Change

Labour won 3, gaining 1 from Conservatives

Conservatives gained 1 from Labour

Birmingham Gazette 3 November 1924.1925DUDLEY

8 Seats contested

6 No Change

Labour won 2, gaining 1 from Conservatives

Ratepayers gained 1 from Conservatives

SMETHWICK

5 Seats contested

4 No Change

Labour won 4, gaining 1 from Conservatives

STOURBRIDGE

2 Seats contested

No Change

Labour won 1

WALSALL

3 Seats contested

2 No Change

Labour won 1, gaining 1 from Ratepayers

WEDNESBURY

4 Seats contested

3 No Change

Labour won 1, gaining 1 from Conservatives

WEST BROMWICH

3 Seats contested

No Change

Labour won 1



WOLVERHAMPTON

6 Seats contested

5 No Change

Labour won 2, gaining 1 from Independents

Birmingham Gazette 3 November 1925.

1926

DUDLEY

9 Seats contested

4 No Change

Labour won 4, gaining 4 from Conservatives

SMETHWICK

6 Seats contested

4 No Change

Labour won 4, gaining 2 from Liberals and Conservatives

STOURBRIDGE

6 Seats contested

6 No Change

Labour won 0

WALSALL

5 Seats contested

5 No Change

Labour won 2

WEDNESBURY

4 Seats contested

3 No Change

Labour won 2, gaining 1 from Conservatives

WEST BROMWICH

0 Seats contested

WOLVERHAMPTON

0 Seats contested due to a borough extension

Birmingham Gazette 2 November 1926.

1927

WOLVERHAMPTON

All 13 seats contested with 3 candidates

Labour won 12, Anti-Socialists won 27.

Express and Star 23 March 1927.

DUDLEY

9 Seats contested

5 No Change

Labour won 5, gaining 3 from Conservatives and 1 from Independents

SMETHWICK

4 Seats contested

3 No Change

Labour won 3, gaining 1

STOURBRIDGE

6 Seats contested

6 No Change

Labour won 0

WALSALL

2 Seats contested

1 No Change

Labour won 2, gaining 1 from Conservatives

WEDNESBURY

4 Seats contested

4 No Change

Labour won 2

WEST BROMWICH

5 Seats contested

4 No change

Labour won 3, losing 1 to Liberals

Birmingham Gazette 2 November 1927.1928DUDLEY

6 Seats contested

4 No Change

Labour won 3, gaining 1 from Conservatives

SMETHWICK

4 Seats contested

4 No Change

Labour won 3

STOURBRIDGE

4 Seats contested

No Change

Labour won 1

WALSALL

3 Seats contested

2 No Change

Labour won 0, losing 1 to Independents

WEDNESBURY

4 Seats contested

3 No Change

Labour won 2, gaining 1 from Independents



WOLVERHAMPTON

8 Seats contested

7 No Change

Labour won 1, losing 1 to Independents

Birmingham Gazette 2 November 1928.1929DUDLEY

7 Seats contested

6 No Change

Labour won 3

SMETHWICK

6 Seats contested

5 No Change

Labour won 4, gaining 1 from Independents

STOURBRIDGE

4 Seats contested

2 No Change

Labour won 2, gaining 2 from Independents

WALSALL

2 Seats contested

2 No Change

Labour won 0

WEDNESBURY

4 Seats contested

3 No Change

Labour won 3, gaining 1 from Conservatives

WEST BROMWICH

3 Seats contested

1 No Change

Labour won 1, gaining 1 from Liberals and losing 1 to Liberals

WOLVERHAMPTON

6 Seats contested

5 No Change

Labour won 1, gaining 1 from Anti-Socialists

Birmingham Gazette 2 November 1929.1930DUDLEY

6 Seats contested

5 No Change

Labour won 2, losing 1 to Liberals

**SMETHWICK**

7 Seats contested

5 No Change

Labour won 2, losing 2 to Conservatives

**STOURBRIDGE**

4 Seats contested

4 No Change

Labour won 0

**WALSALL**

3 Seats contested

2 No Change

Labour won 0, losing 1 to Independents

**WEDNESBURY**

4 Seats contested

3 No Change

Labour won 1, losing 1 to Conservatives

**WEST BROMWICH**

2 Seats contested

1 No Change

Labour won 0, losing 1 to Independents

**WOLVERHAMPTON**

3 Seats contested

1 No Change

Labour won 1, gaining 1 and losing 1 to Conservatives

**Birmingham Gazette 3 November 1930****1931****SMETHWICK**

6 Seats contested

4 No Change

Labour won 1, losing 2 to Conservatives

**STOURBRIDGE**

2 Seats contested

2 No Change

Labour won 0

**WALSALL**

5 Seats contested

Labour won 4

**WEDNESBURY**

4 Seats contested

3 No Change

Labour won 1, losing 1 to Conservatives

**WEST BROMWICH**

6 Seats contested

5 No Change

Labour won 3



1932DUDLEY

10 Seats contested

9 No Change

Labour won 7, gaining 2 from Conservatives

SMETHWICK

8 Seats contested

7 No Change

Labour won 6, gaining 1 from Conservatives

WALSALL

5 Seats contested

4 No Change

Labour won 4, gaining 1 from Independents

WEDNESBURY

4 Seats contested

4 No Change

Labour won 3

WEST BROMWICH

3 Seats contested

3 No Change

Labour won 2

WOLVERHAMPTON

7 Seats contested

5 No Change

Labour won 3, losing 2 to ILA

ILA won 2, gaining 2

Birmingham Gazette 2 November 1932

1933BILSTON

First election for municipal borough

15 Seats available

Labour won 2 unopposed

DUDLEY

9 Seats contested

8 No Change

Labour won 5, gaining 1 from Conservatives

SMETHWICK

6 Seats contested

4 No Change

Labour won 2, gaining 2 from Conservatives

WALSALL

4 Seats contested

3 No Change

Labour won 1, gaining 1 from Independents

WEDNESBURY

4 Seats contested

3 No Change

Labour won 2, gaining 1 from Conservatives

WEST BROMWICH

5 Seats contested

3 No Change

Labour won 3, gaining 1 from Independents

WOLVERHAMPTON

5 Seats contested

3 No Change

Labour won 0

Trade Unions gained 1 from Conservatives

Birmingham Gazette 2 November 1933.1934BILSTON

2 Seats contested

2 No Change

Labour won 0

DUDLEY

10 Seats contested

8 No Change

Labour won 2, losing 2 to Conservatives

ROWLEY REGIS

8 Seats contested

7 No Change

Labour won 4, gaining 1 from Independents

SMETHWICK

6 Seats contested

6 No Change

Labour won 1

STOURBRIDGE

2 Seats contested

1 No Change

Labour won 1, gaining 1

WALSALL

5 Seats contested

5 No Change

Labour won 3

WEDNESBURY

4 Seats contested

1 No Change

Labour won 3, gaining 2 from Ratepayers

WEST BROMWICH

6 Seats contested

5 No Change

Labour won 3



**WOLVERHAMPTON**

3 Seats contested

2 No Change

Labour won 0

ILA gained 1 from an Independent

Birmingham Gazette 2 November 1934.1935**BILSTON**

1 Seat contested

1 No Change

Labour won 1

**DUDLEY**

8 Seats contested

5 No Change

Labour won 3, losing 3 to Conservatives

**OLDBURY**

First election as municipal borough

21 Seats available

Labour won 5 Independents won 16

**ROWLEY REGIS**

8 Seats contested

4 No Change

Labour won 3, gaining 2 from Independents and losing 2 to Independents

**SMETHWICK**

8 Seats contested

6 No Change

Labour won 4, losing 1 to Conservatives and 1 to Independents

**STOURBRIDGE**

5 Seats contested

5 No Change

Labour won 0

**WALSALL**

5 Seats contested

4 No Change

Labour won 2, losing 1 to Independents

**WEDNESBURY**

4 Seats contested

4 No Change

Labour won 3

**WEST BROMWICH**

2 Seats contested

1 No Change

Labour won 2, gaining 1

**WOLVERHAMPTON**

8 Seats contested

6 No Change

Labour won 1, losing 1 to Conservatives

ILA won 1, losing 1 to Independents

**Birmingham Gazette 2 November 1935****1936****BILSTON**

5 Unopposed

**DUDLEY**

8 Seats contested

5 No Change

Labour won 3, losing 3 to Conservatives

**OLDBURY**

3 Seats contested

3 No Change

Labour won 1

**ROWLEY REGIS**

8 Seats contested

4 No Change

Labour won 6, gaining 3

**SMETHWICK**

6 Seats contested

3 No Change

Labour won 3, gaining 1 from Conservatives and losing 2 to Independents and Conservatives

**STOURBRIDGE**

5 Seats contested

3 No Change

Labour won 1, gaining 1 from Independents and losing 1 to Independents

**WALSALL**

4 Seats contested

4 No Change

Labour won 2

**WEDNESBURY**

4 Seats contested

1 No Change

Labour won 0, losing 1 to Conservatives and 2 to Independents

**WEST BROMWICH**

4 Seats contested

3 No Change

Labour won 2, losing 1 to Independents



WOLVERHAMPTON

4 Seats contested

3 No Change

Labour won 2

ILA won 1, gaining 1 from Independents

Birmingham Gazette 3 November 1936.

1937

BILSTON

3 Seats contested

2 No Change

Labour won 1, gaining 1

DUDLEY

4 Seats contested

3 No Change

Labour won 0, losing 1

OLDBURY

2 Seats contested

2 No Change

Labour won 0

ROWLEY REGIS

8 Seats contested

5 No Change

Labour won 0, losing 2 to Independents

SMETHWICK

6 Seats contested

5 No Change

Labour won 1, losing 1 to Independents

STOURBRIDGE

5 Seats contested

4 No Change

Labour won 2, losing 1 to Independents

WALSALL

3 Seats contested

3 No Change

Labour won 3, including 1 unofficial Labour

WEDNESBURY

4 Seats contested

2 No Change

Labour won 1, losing 1 to Conservatives and 1 to Independent Ratepayers

WEST BROMWICH

4 Seats contested

2 No Change

Labour won 3, gaining from Independents and losing 1 to Independents

WOLVERHAMPTON

5 Seats contested  
 5 No Change  
 Labour won 3  
 ILA won 1

Birmingham Gazette 2 November 1937

1938

BILSTON

1 Seat contested  
 1 No change  
 Labour won 1

DUDLEY

4 Seats contested  
 3 No Change  
 Labour won 2, losing 1 to Conservatives

OLDBURY

2 Labour and 5 Independents unopposed

ROWLEY REGIS

7 Seats contested  
 6 No Change  
 Labour won 3, gaining 1 from Independents

SMETHWICK

6 Seats contested  
 5 No Change  
 Labour won 2, losing 1 to Conservatives

STOURBRIDGE

5 Seats contested  
 3 No Change  
 Labour won 1, gaining 1 from Independents and losing 1 to Independents

TIPTON

First election for municipal borough  
 9 Seats contested  
 Labour won 3, Independents won 6

WALSALL

2 Seats contested  
 1 No Change  
 Labour won 1, gaining 1

WEDNESBURY

4 Seats contested  
 3 No Change  
 Labour won 2, losing 1 to Independents

WEST BROMWICH

2 Seats contested  
 1 No change  
 Labour won 1, gaining 1 from Independents



WOLVERHAMPTON

3 Seats contested

3 No Change

Labour won 1

Birmingham Gazette 2 November 1938.

TABLE F INDIVIDUAL LABOUR PARTY MEMBERSHIP IN THE BLACK COUNTRY 1918-1927

Figures are the total subscriptions for individual members. The minimum was £1/10. Those who could not meet this total were not given a figure. Members were expected to pay an annual fee of 2d.

Party	1918	1919	1920	1921	1922
Dudley	£1/10	£6/10/8	£1/10	£1/10	£1/10
Kingswinford	---	£1/10	£1/10	£1/10	---
Smethwick	£1/10	---	---	---	£1/10
Stourbridge	£1/10	£1/10	£1/10	£1/10	
Walsall	£1/10	£2/15	£3/6/8	£3/6/9	£2/10
Wednesbury	£1/10	£1/10	£1/10	---	---
W. Bromwich	---	£1/10	£1/10	---	---
Wolv. Bilston	---	---	£1/10	£1/10	£1/10
Wolv. East	---	---	£1/10	£1/10	£1/10
Wolv. West	£7/10*	£3	£3	£1/10	£1/13/4

Party	1923	1924	1925	1926	1927
Dudley	£1/10	£3/6/8	---	---	---
Kingswinford	---	---	---	£1/10	---
Smethwick	£1/10	£1/10	£1/10	£2/15/10	£2/10
Stourbridge	£1/10	£2	£2/10	£4/3/4	£4/3/4
Walsall	£1/10	£1/10	£1/10	£3	£1/10
Wednesbury	£1/10	---	£1/10	£3/12	£1/10
W. Bromwich	£1/10	£1/10	£1/10	£2/3	£1/10
Wolv. Bilston	£1/10	£1/10	£1/10	£12	£5/10
Wolv. East	£1/10	£1/10	£1/10	---	£1/10
Wolv. West	£1/10	£1/10	£2/10	£2/10	£2/10

- The Wolverhampton East Constituency Party was not set up at this time. Hence figure is a combined total for East and West.

Labour Party Annual Report 1919-1928.



TABLE G INDIVIDUAL LABOUR PARTY MEMEBERSHIP IN THE BLACK COUNTRY 1928-39

Party	1928	1929	1930	1931	1932
Dudley	---	---	240	880	1561
Kingswinford	180	378	340	713	1454
Smethwick	240	240	240	240	590
Stourbridge	600	930	1010	1079	1519
Walsall	300	180	340	360	760
Wednesbury	---	180	508	461	777
W. Bromwich	42	180	240	358	710
Wolv. Bilston	700	660	240	750	774
Wolv. East	180	180	240	240	240
Wolv. West	300	300	650	400	381

Party	1933			1934			1935		
	M	W	Total	M	W	Total	M	W	Total
Dudley	489	488	977	346	406	752	239	275	514
Kingswinford	277	546	823	259	360	619	263	475	738
Smethwick	291	326	617	260	285	545	231	304	535
Stourbridge	578	722	1300	406	594	1000	439	536	975
Walsall	353	307	660	248	211	459	365	276	641
Wednesbury	349	798	1147	363	494	857	381	592	973
West Bromwich	550	600	1150	430	420	850	271	346	617
Wolv. Bilston	276	401	677	445	550	995	325	438	763
Wolv. East	220	64	284	190	50	240	120	120	240
Wolv. West	158	220	378	104	163	267	132	162	294

Party	1936			1937			1938		
	M	W	Total	M	W	Total	M	W	Total
Dudley	250	250	500	140	100	240	120	120	240
Kingswinford	365	550	915	356	377	733	356	377	733
Smethwick	227	247	474	196	208	404	175	291	466
Stourbridge	475	525	1000	325	375	700	410	430	840
Walsall	238	244	482	161	143	303	129	127	256
Wednesbury	307	355	662	140	221	361	200	212	412
West Bromwich	118	185	303	360	460	820	224	323	547
Wolv. Bilston	232	415	647	513	195	708	220	321	541
Wolv. East	160	80	240	160	80	240	---	---	---
Wolv. West	100	140	240	100	140	240	151	139	290

Party	1939
Dudley	374
Kingswinford	681
Smethwick	249
Stourbridge	620
Walsall	369
Wednesbury	407
West Bromwich	444
Wolv. Bilston	750
Wolv. East	240
Wolv. West	310



TABLE H. INDIVIDUAL LABOUR PARTY MEMBERSHIP IN BIRMINGHAM 1928-39

Party	1928	1929	1930	1931	1932
Aston	---	396	400	371	317
Deritend	117	180	360	280	470
Duddeston	152	168	240	240	282
Edgbaston	---	180	710	490	460
Erdington	180	180	782	507	939
Handsworth	336	322	491	475	435
King's Norton	630	630	1002	936	1284
Ladywood	330	350	493	322	850
Moseley	180	180	755	667	1052
Sparkbrook	180	283	382	251	339
West Birm.	360	420	600	624	1054
Yardley	600	600	610	440	448

Party	1933			1934			1935		
	M	W	Total	M	W	Total	M	W	Total
Aston	177	143	320	186	118	304	200	120	320
Deritend	228	167	395	136	137	273	138	138	276
Duddeston	151	95	246	140	100	240	140	100	240
Edgbaston	186	66	252	200	95	295	140	100	240
Erdington	696	381	1077	653	324	977	590	275	865
Handsworth	259	230	489	222	218	440	199	210	409
King's Norton	724	558	1282	733	526	1259	961	626	1587
Ladywood	295	333	628	189	249	438	193	263	456
Moseley	597	229	826	444	203	647	470	314	784
Sparkbrook	188	82	270	167	115	414	127	126	253
West Birmingham	450	600	1050	390	460	850	351	442	793
Yardley	267	175	442	267	195	714	365	261	626

Party	1936			1937			1938		
	M	W	Total	M	W	Total	M	W	Total
Aston	134	106	240	120	120	240	120	120	240
Deritend	120	120	240	120	120	240	120	120	240
Duddeston	140	100	240	140	100	240	144	144	288
Edgbaston	120	120	240	195	195	390	136	141	277
Erdington	737	359	1096	531	255	786	241	228	469
Handsworth	179	192	371	177	174	351	172	166	338
King's Norton	993	706	1699	1030	778	1808	1031	678	1709
Ladywood	189	214	403	150	171	321	174	210	384
Moseley	539	342	881	276	134	410	242	98	340
Sparkbrook	157	120	277	140	100	240	190	150	340
West Birmingham	313	403	716	235	300	535	245	330	575
Yardley	358	221	579	501	280	781	673	405	1078



Party	1939
Aston	240
Deritend	240
Duddeston	240
Edgbaston	342
Erdington	626
Handsworth	346
King's Norton	1734
Ladywood	360
Moseley	309
Sparkbrook	304
West Birmingham	750
Yardley	1174

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

### 1. UNPUBLISHED SOURCES

Birmingham Borough Labour Party Minutes 1918-1939 – Birmingham Reference Library.

Wolverhampton Labour Party Minutes 1918-1930 – Birmingham Reference Library.

West Wolverhampton Labour Party Minutes 1930-1939 – Birmingham Reference Library.

Walsall Labour Party Minutes 1929-1939 – Walsall Local History Library

Bilston Labour Party Women's Section Minutes 1926-1931 – Wolverhampton Local History Library..

Newspaper Cuttings on Frank Roberts and W.J.Brown – Labour Party Archives, Museum of Labour History Manchester.

Newspaper Cuttings on the New Party – Labour Party Archives, Museum of Labour History, Manchester.

NEC Minutes – Birmingham Reference Library.

Consevative Party Report on 1929 Election – Birmingham Reference Library.

Election Manifestos for 1931 General Election – Charlie Sitch, Wilfred Wellock, W.E.Lawrence, John Baker – Labour Party Archives, Museum of Labour History, Manchester.

Walsall Election Manifestos – Joseph Thickett 1918, Richard Cooper 1918, Arthur Osburn 1923, W.Preston 1929, J.J.McShane 1931, J.A.Leckie 1931 – Walsall Local History Library.

Wolverhampton Election Manifestos – Rev. J.A.Shaw 1918, A.G.Walkden by-election 1922, W.J.Brown 1924 – Wolverhampton Local History Library.

### 2. PUBLISHED SOURCES

Hansard

Labour Party Annual Report 1919 – 1940 – Labour Party Archives, Museum of Labour History, Manchester.

Kelly's Directory of Staffordshire 1924 – Birmingham Reference Library.

Kelly's Directory of Worcestershire 1924 – Birmingham Reference Library.

### 3. NEWSPAPERS

#### A. NATIONAL

Daily Mail

The Times

#### B. BIRMINGHAM

Birmingham Dispatch

Birmingham Gazette

Birmingham Mail

Birmingham Post



Town Crier

## C. BLACK COUNTRY

Dudley Herald

Midland Advertiser and Wednesbury Herald

Midland Chronicle

Smethwick Telephone

Tipton Herald

Walsall Observer

West Bromwich Free Press

Wolverhampton Express and Star

## 4. CONTEMPORARY ACCOUNTS

Brown, W.J. So Far (1943).

Hamilton, M.A. Mary MacArthur (1925)

Postgate, R.W., Wilkinson, E. and Horrabin, J.F. (eds.) A Worker's History of the General Strike (1927)

## 5. SECONDARY SOURCES

### A. BOOKS

Aldcroft, D.H. The Inter-War Economy 1919-39 (1960).

Alford, B.W.E. Depression and Recovery? British Economic Growth 1918-1939 (1972).

Allen, G.C. The Industrial Development of Birmingham and the Black Country 1960-1927 (1928).

Ball, S. Baldwin and the Conservative Party: The Crisis of 1929-1931 (1988).

Barnsby, G. Socialism in Birmingham and the Black Country 1850-1939 (1998).

Bellamy, J. and Saville, J. (Eds) The Dictionary of Labour Biography, (1972-1993).

Benson, J. The Working Class in Britain 1850-1939 (1989).

Bentley, M. The Climax of Liberal Politics: British Liberalism in Theory and Practice 1868-1918 (1987).

Brendon, P. The Dark Valley: A Panorama of the 1930s (2000).

Brewer, J.D. Mosley's Men: The British Union of Fascists in the West Midlands (1984).

Briggs, A. History of Birmingham Volume 2 (1952).

Brown, K. (Ed) Essays in Anti-Labour History (1974).

Bullock, A. The Life and Times of Ernest Bevin, Volume 1: Trade Union Leader, 1881-1940 (1960).

Butler, D. and Butler, G. British Political Facts (1994 ed).

Butler, D. and Stokes, D. Political Change in Britain (1971 ed).

Capie, F. Depression and Protectionism: Britain between the Wars (1983).

Chester, L., Fay, S. and Young, H. The Zinoviev Letter (1967).

- Clarke, P.F. Lancashire and the New Liberalism (1971).
- Cole, G.D.H. A History of the Labour Party from 1914 (1948).
- Cook, C. The Age of Alignment: Electoral Politics in Britain 1922-1929 (1975).
- Corbett, J. Birmingham Trades Council 1866-1966 (1966).
- Cowling, M. The Impact of Labour 1920-1924: The Beginning of Modern British Politics (1971).
- Craig, F.W.S. British Parliamentary Election Results (1969).
- Cronin, J.E. Labour and Society in Britain 1918-1979 (1984)
- Cross, C. Philip Snowden (1966).
- Dalton, H. The Fateful Years: Memoirs, 1931-1945 (1957).
- Dean, K.J. Town and Westminster (1971).
- Ede, J.F. History of Wednesbury (1962).
- Foot, M. Aneurin Bevan: A Biography, Vol. 1 1897-1945 (1962).
- Graves, P. Labour Women: Women in British Working Class Politics, 1918-1939 (1994).
- Hinton, J. Labour and Socialism: A History of the British Labour Movement, 1867-1914 (1983)
- Hopkins, E. A Social History of the English Working Classes (1979).
- Hyman, R. The Workers Union (1971).
- Jones, G. Borough Politics: a study of the Wolverhampton Town Council, 1888-1964 (1969).
- Laybourn, K. Britain on the Breadline: A Social and Political History of Britain 1918-1939 (1990).
- Laybourn K. The Rise of Labour: The British Labour Party 1890-1979 (1988).
- Linehan, T. British Fascism 1918-39 Parties, Ideology and Culture (2000).
- Marquand, D. Ramsay MacDonald (1977).
- Marwick, A. The Deluge: British Society and the First World War (1965).
- McKenzie, R. and Silver A. Angels in Marble (1968).
- McKibbin, R.I. The Evolution of the Labour Party, 1910-1924 (1974).
- McKibbin, R.I. The Ideologies of Class: Social Relations in Britain, 1880-1950 (1990).
- McKibbin, R.I. Classes and Cultures: England 1918-1951 (1998).
- Morgan, K. Consensus and Disunity: The Lloyd George Coalition Government 1918-1922 (1979).
- Morris, M. The General Strike (1976).
- Mosley, O. My Life (1968).
- Mowat, C.L. Britain Between the Wars 1918-1940 (1955).



- Naylor, J.F. Labour's International Policy: the Labour Party in the 1930s (1969).
- Peele, G. and Cook, C. (Eds) The Politics of Reappraisal 1918-1939 (1975).
- Pelling, H. A History of British Trade Unionism (1963).
- Pelling, H. The Origins of the Labour Party (1954).
- Pelling, H. A Short History of the Labour Party (1955; 8<sup>th</sup> ed 1985).
- Pelling, H. The Social Geography of British Elections 1885-1910 (1967).
- Pimlott, B. Hugh Dalton (1985).
- Pimlott, B. Labour and the Left in the 1930s (1977).
- Pollard, S. The Development of the British Economy, 1914-80 (1983)
- Pugh, M. The Tories and the People (1985).
- Pugh, M. The Making of Modern British Politics 1867-1939 (2<sup>nd</sup> edition 1993).
- Pugh, M. Women and the Women's Movement in Britain 1914-1959 (1992)
- Ramsden, J. The Age of Balfour and Baldwin (1978).
- Reynolds, J. and Laybourn, K. Labour Heartland: The History of the Labour Party in West Yorkshire during the Inter-War Years, 1918-1939 (1987).
- Riddell, N. Labour in Crisis: The Second Labour Government 1929-1931 (1999).
- Savage, M. The Dynamics of Working Class Politics: The Labour Movement in Preston, 1880-1940 (1987).
- Savage, M. and Miles, A. The Remaking of the British working Class 1840-1940 (1994).
- Skidelsky, R. Oswald Mosley (1975).
- Skidelsky, R. Politicians and the Slump: The Labour Government of 1929-1931 (1967).
- Smart, N. The National Government (1999).
- Stannage, T. Baldwin Thwarts the Opposition (1980).
- Stenton, M. and Lees, S. (Eds) Who's Who of British Members of Parliament Volume 3 1918-1945 (1979).
- Stevenson, J. Social Conditions in Britain between the Wars (1977).
- Stevenson, J. and Cook, C. Britain in the Depression: Society and Politics 1929-1939 (1994ed).
- Tanner, D. Political Change and the Labour Party, 1900-1918 (1990).
- Taylor, A.J.P. English History 1914-1945 (1965).
- Thorpe, A. Britain in the 1930s (1992).
- Thorpe, A. The British General Election of 1931 (1991).
- Thorpe, A. A History of the British Labour Party (1997).

Turner, J. British Politics and the Great War: Coalition and Conflict, 1915-1918 (1992).

Williamson, P. National Crisis and National Government: British Politics, the Economy and Empire 1926-1932 (1992).

Williamson, P. Stanley Baldwin (1999).

Wilson, T. The Downfall of the Liberal Party (1966).

Winter, J.M. Socialism and the Challenge of War: Ideas and Politics in Britain 1912-1918 (1974).

Wrigley, C. David Lloyd George and the British Labour Movement (1976)

Wrigley, C. Lloyd George and the Challenge of Labour: The Post-War Coalition 1918-1922 (1990).

Wrigley, C. Arthur Henderson (1990).

## B. ARTICLES

Abrams, P. 'The Failure of Social Reform 1918-1920'. Past and Present (1963) P59-62.

Barker, R. 'Political Myth: Ramsay MacDonald and the Labour Party'. History 61: 1 (1976) P46-56.

Barnsby, G. 'The General Strike in the Black Country'. in Skelley, J. (Ed) The General Strike 1926 (1976) P193-208.

Bennett, G.H. 'Part of the Puzzle. Northampton and other Midland By election defeats for the Conservatives 1927-1929'. Midland History XX (1995) P151-73..

Benson, J. 'Black Country History and Labour History'. Midland History XV (1990) P100-10.

Blewett, N. 'The Franchise in the U.K. 1885-1918'. Past and Present (1965) P27-56.

Booth, A. and Glynn, S. 'Unemployment in the Inter-war Period: A Multiple Problem'. Journal of Contemporary History 10, October 1975 P611-36.

Boughton, J. 'Working-Class Conservatism and the Rise of Labour: A Case Study of Birmingham in the 1920s'. The Historian 59 (1998) P16-20.

Brown, K.D. 'The Trade Union Tariff Reform Association, 1904-1913'. Journal of British Studies IX Part 2 (1970) P141-53.

Chamberlain, C. 'The Growth of Support for the Labour Party in Britain'. British Journal of Sociology Volume 24, (1973) P474-89.

Clarke, P.F. 'The Electoral Position of the Liberal and Labour Parties, 1910-1914'. English Historical Review, 90 (1975) P828-36.

Clarke, P.F. 'Liberals, Labour and the Franchise'. English Historical Review, (1977).P582-89.

Close, D.H. 'The Realignment of the British Electorate in 1931'. History 67 (1982) P393-404.

Cook, C. 'Liberals, Labour and Local Elections' in Peele, G. and Cook C. (Eds) The Politics of Reappraisal 1918-1939 (1975) P166-89.

Cook, C. 'Labour's Electoral Base' in Cook, C. and Taylor, I. (Eds) The Labour Party (1980) P84-96.



- Douglas, R. 'The National Democratic Party and The British Workers' League'. The Historical Journal XV 3 (1972) P533-52.
- Douglas, R. 'Labour in Decline' in Brown, K. Essays in Anti-Labour History (1974).
- Dunbabin, J.P.P. 'British Elections in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Centuries: A Regional Approach'. English Historical Review 95, April 1980.
- Eatwell, R. and Wright, A. 'Labour and the Lessons of 1931'. History 63 (1978) P38-53.
- Harrison, R. 'The War Emergency Workers' National Committee, 1914-1920' in Briggs and Saville (Eds) Essays in Labour History, 1886-1923 P211-59.(1971)
- Hart, M. 'The Liberals, the War and the Franchise'. English Historical Review XCVII, (1982) P 820-32.
- Hastings, R.P. 'The General Strike in Birmingham' in Skelley, J (Ed) The General Strike 1926.. (1976) P208-26.
- Hastings, R.P. 'The Birmingham Labour Movement, 1918-1945'. Midland History, 5 (1979-1980) P78-92.
- Hill, B.K. 'Women and Unemployment in Birmingham 1918-1939'. Midland History XXVII (2002) P130-45.
- Hopkins, E. 'Working Class Life in Birmingham between the Wars'. Midland History XV (1990) P129-50.
- Hopkins, E. 'Industrial Change and Life at Work in Birmingham 1850-1914'. Midland History XXVII (2002) P112-29.
- Howard, C. 'Expectations Born to Death: Local Labour Party Expansion in the 1920s' in Winter, J. (Ed) The Working Class in Modern British History: Essays in Honour of Henry Pelling (1983) P65-81.
- Laybourn, K. 'The Rise of Labour and the Decline of Liberalism: The State of the Debate'. History, 80, 259 (1995) P207-26.
- MacIntyre, S. 'British Labour, Marxism and Working Class Apathy in the 1920s'. Historical Journal, 20, (1977) P479-96.
- Matthew, H.C.G., McKibbin, R.I. and Kay, J. 'The Franchise Factor in the Rise of the Labour Party'. English Historical Review, 91 (1976) P723-52.
- McKibbin, R.I. 'The Economic Policy of the Second Labour Government, 1929-1931'. Past and Present 68 (1975), P95-123.
- McKibbin, R.I. 'Why was there no Marxism in Great Britain ?' English Historical Review (1984) P298-331.
- McLean, I.S. 'Oxford and Bridgwater' in Cook, C. and Ramsden, J. (Eds) By-elections in British Politics (1975).
- Parkin, F. 'Working-class Conservatives: A Theory of Political Deviance'. British Journal of Sociology Volume 18 (1967)
- Pugh. M. 'The Rise of Labour and the Political Culture of Conservatism, 1890-1945'. History 87, 288, (2002) P514-37.
- Renshaw, P. 'Anti-Labour Politics in Britain 1918-1927'. Journal of Contemporary History 12, (1977) P693-705.

Roberts, S. 'Politics and the British Working Class: the General Elections of 1900 and 1906'. West Midland Studies Vol. 15 (1982) P12-17.

Roberts, S. 'Independent Labour Politics in Birmingham 1886-1914'. West Midland Studies Vol. 16 (1983) P9-15.

Seymore-Ure, C. 'The Press and the Party System between the Wars' in Peele, G. and Cook, C. (Eds.) The Politics of Reappraisal 1918-1939 (1975) P232-57

Tanner, D. 'The Parliamentary Electoral System, the "Fourth" Reform Act and the Rise of Labour'. Institute of Historical Research Bulletin, 56 (1983) P205-19.

Tanner, D. 'Elections, Statistics and the Rise of the Labour Party 1906-1931'. Historical Journal 34, 4 (1991) P893-908.

Taylor, E. 'The Midland Counties Trades Federation 1886-1914'. Midland History 1 (1972) P26-40.

Thorpe, A. 'J.H. Thomas and the Rise of Labour in Derby, 1880-1945'. Midland History 40 (1990), P111-28.

Webster, C. 'Health, Welfare and Unemployment during the Depression'. Past and Present 109 (1985) P204-30.

Williamson, P. 'A "Bankers' Ramp"? Financiers and the British Political Crisis of 1931'. English Historical Review 99: 4 (1984), P770-806.

Williamson, P. 'Safety First: Baldwin, the Conservative Party and the 1929 General Election'. Historical Journal 25,2 1982 P385-409.

Wrigley, C. 'Labour and the Trade Unions' in Brown, K.D. The First Labour Party 1906-1914 (1985) P129-57.

### C. UNPUBLISHED THESES

Bullock, A.J. 'The Progress of the Labour Party in Birmingham 1918-1924' M.A. Thesis, University of Wolverhampton (1994).

Davies, R.S.W. 'Differentiation in the Working Class, Class Consciousness and the Development of the Labour Party in Liverpool'. PhD. Thesis, Liverpool John Moore's University (1993)

Gardiner, K.D. 'The Structure, Organisation and Electoral Performance of the Conservative Party in Wolverhampton 1918-1939'. M.Phil. Thesis, University of Wolverhampton (1994).

Hastings, R.P. 'The Birmingham Labour Movement 1927-1945' M.A. Thesis, University of Birmingham (1959).

Horsnell, C.J. 'The Coal Mining Trade Unions of the Black Country 1914-1927'. M.A. Thesis, University of Wolverhampton (1991).

Page, P. 'Candidacy and Campaigning in Wolverhampton Parliamentary Elections 1900-1918'. M.A. Thesis, University of Wolverhampton (1985).

Pickerell, D. 'History of the West Bromwich Labour Party'. Unpublished account in Smethwick Library.



Rolfe, K.W.D. 'Tories, Tariffs and Elections: the West Midlands in English Politics 1918-35'. Ph.D. Thesis, University of Cambridge (1974).

Taylor, E. 'The Working Class Movement in the Black Country 1863-1914'. PhD Thesis, University of Keele (1974).

Ward, J. 'The Emergence of the Labour Party in the Black Country 1910-22'. M.A. Thesis, University of Wolverhampton (1993).

Wareing, R. 'Birmingham Politics 1891-1914'. M.A. Thesis, University of Wolverhampton (1983).